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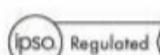
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Registered Office: Academic House, 24 28 Oval Road, London, NW1 7DT

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US INFO

• **Classic Bike** ISSN 0142 890X, UPS 706770 is published monthly by H Bauer Publishing Ltd. The US annual subscription price is \$110.83. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent Named WN Shipping USA, 156 15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA.
• Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431.
• US Postmaster: Send address changes to **Classic Bike**, WN Shipping USA, 156 15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA.
• Subscription records are maintained at Bauer Media, Subscriptions, CDS Global, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9EF, United Kingdom.
• Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

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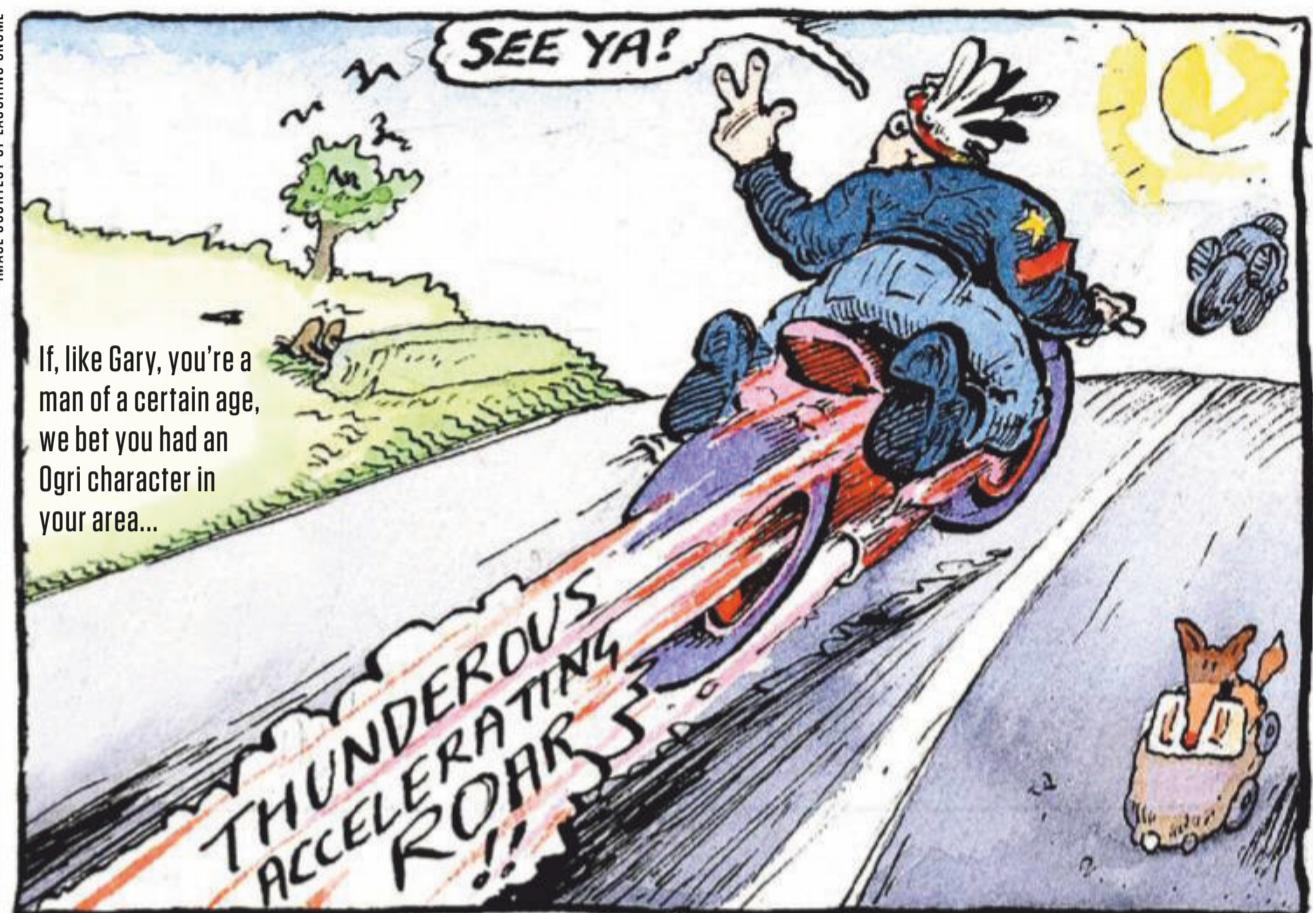
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Welcome

FEBRUARY 2020 • ISSUE #481

IMAGE COURTESY OF LAUGHING GNOME



KILLER CHARACTER

I quickly realised when I got into bikes that it wasn't just about the motorcycles themselves that I liked, but the characters it seemed to attract. But while racing in that era seemed to generate characters at will (more's the pity that's not the case these days), it seemed to be that you only had to park your bike up to meet interesting folks with a motorcycle.

I guess it's why Paul Sample's Ogri always seemed to strike a chord. In our local area we had our own Ogri. He was known as 'Killer'. His surname was Escott; I've still no idea of his first name, but he was an archetypal biker of the era. He could have been Ogri's brother.

Killer was from out of town, but occasionally showed up on a Saturday in the marketplace where we used to hang out. When he did, it was an event. His outrageously noisy Triton would burst from the lights to the parking area with way more acceleration than necessary. Pensioners would pass, shaking their heads and holding their ears, muttering 'young hooligan...'

It was the ultimate Triton, when a Triton was the bike to have: clip-ons, rearsets, a sleek racing tank and seat. Not polished or glitzy. More of an oily-rag bike – just how Rick P loves 'em. It was the bike we all dreamed of owning.

Killer wore a fabulously-aged Barbour jacket, its waxed coating polished to a sheen, ensuring black fingernails when just pulling the thing on. The cuffs were threadbare and the pocket flaps curled like stale sarnies – even the carefully-curated

badge collection couldn't pin them down!

He wore a pudding basin and aviators and, once the din from his bike had quietened down and petrol cocks had been turned off, there was always the ritual of pushing the goggles on the top of the helmet, removing the lid, folding the gloves into it... and then unfastening the jacket before he ever uttered a word.

Killer by name, he was a teddy bear by nature, softly spoken, with a wry grin, clearly incredibly knowledgeable about British iron. He was one of those people who only spoke when absolutely necessary... but it was only ever gems of knowledge.

We were all 'Malcolms' in his presence, on our learner C15s, Bantams, Cubs, etc. Our bikes mere insignificant compared to his racey Triton. Our levels of experience pitiful compared to his worldly depth of understanding.

Funny how seeing the Ogri book (see page 12) stirred thoughts of him after all these years...



Gary Pinchin
Editor

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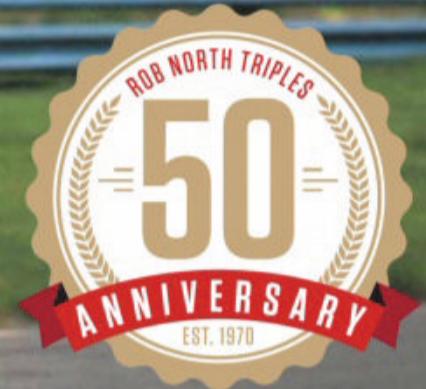
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FEBRUARY 2020



SPECIALS
WAY WE WERE
EVENTS
YOUR CLASSICS
LETTERS



Beese Wendt tackles a super-steep American hillclimb on the Vincent



BONHAMS LAS VEGAS
SALE JAN 23

King of the hill

This hard-hitting hillclimb special, on offer at Bonhams' Las Vegas sale, must be one of the most extraordinary Vincent twins anywhere

WORDS: GEZ KANE PHOTOGRAPHY: BONHAMS

WE'VE SEEN PLENTY of concours Vincent twins go under the hammer at Bonhams sales over the years – and plenty of restoration projects, too. We've also seen a few race bikes and record breakers go up for sale in everything from 'as raced' to immaculate condition. But this heavily-modified 1947 Rapide being offered for sale at the actioneers' Las Vegas sale on January 23 has to be one of the most unusual. It also has to be one of the most successful, with five national pro-class hillclimb championships – in two different countries – to its credit.

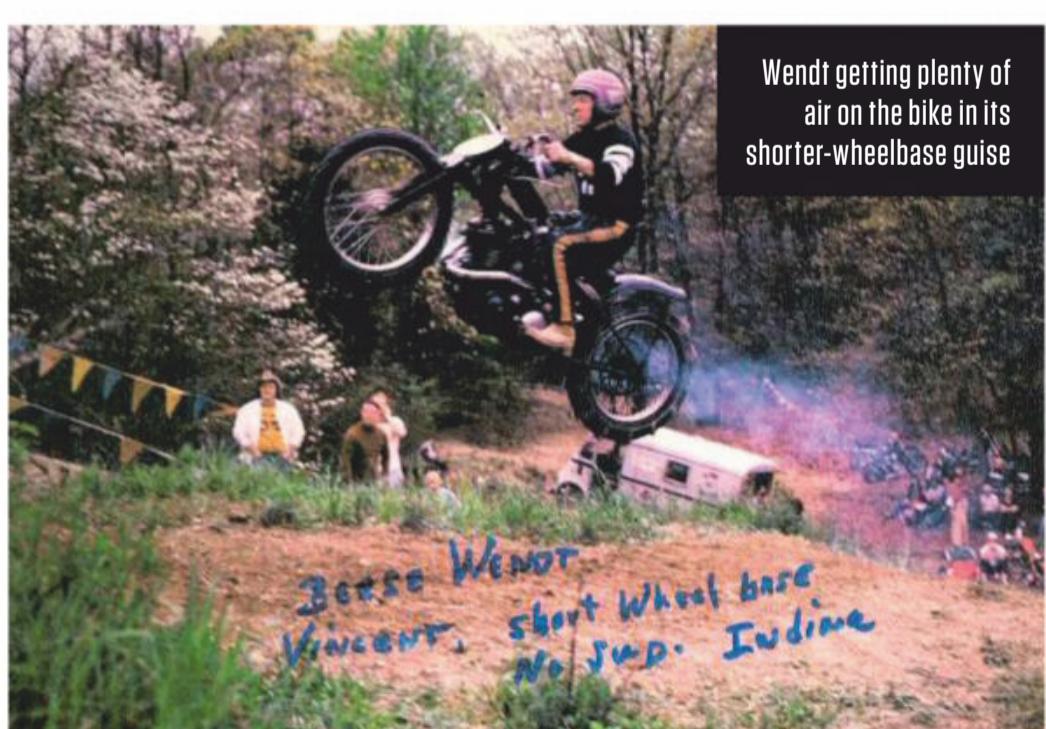
Given the exalted status Vincent twins command now – and consequently sky-high prices – it's hard to believe that this particular example of the marque was bought by hillclimber Glen Kyle for just \$50 back in the late '50s. Back then, Vincent's big twins were still the fastest thing on two wheels and Kyle could obviously see the potential of the Rapide for the freakishly steep off-road hillclimbs so popular in America. But more than a little work was needed to turn the \$50 junker into a multiple championship winner.

**10****A PROPER OLD MAICO***Bike (65), owner (82)***12****OGRI RIDES ON***New book reviewed*

Heavily-modified 1947 Vincent Rapide has racked up five national pro-class hillclimb championships – in two different countries

First, there was the little matter of the AMA's maximum permitted displacement of 750cc for ohv engines. Kyle's solution to that was a re-engineered, short-stroke crank, with an Alpha crankpin and a pair of BSA pistons running in sleeved-down bores. To maximise power, he used Black Lightning cams, 1 1/4in Dell'Orto carburettors – and ran the bike on a 70% nitromethane fuel mix. With little time for shifting gear on the brutally rough hillclimb courses, Kyle also ran a single-speed transmission, using the redundant space in the gearbox case to hold engine oil. With an elongated frame, the machine proved highly effective, delivering Kyle to his first national title in 1963. It would prove to be the first of many.

AMA pro-class hillclimbing was (and still is) a tough sport. In essence, we're talking a near-vertical off-road drag race, with ruts, jumps, rocks and loose dirt adding to the challenge of racing up an almost impossibly steep gradient. But Kyle – something of a perfectionist with his preparation and race-day routines – was a master



Wendt getting plenty of air on the bike in its shorter-wheelbase guise



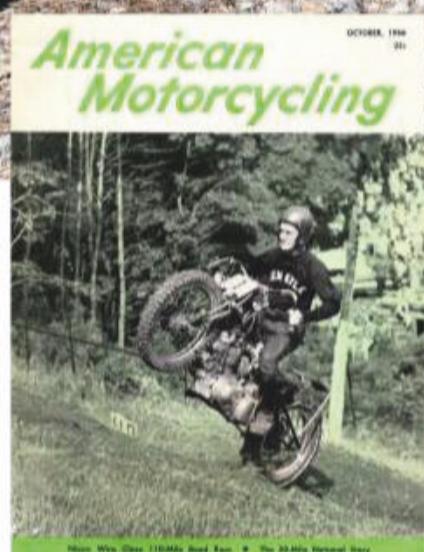
The bike is being sold by Bonhams in as-last-raced condition, with extensive history



To conform to AMA regs, the engine's capacity was reduced with a re-engineered short-stroke crank and sleeved-down bores



Dell'Orto 1 1/4in carburetors were fitted to maximise power output for hillclimbing



of his high-speed art. He won the title again in 1965 before *Cycle* magazine caught up with him to follow his fortunes at a race in Freemansburg, Pennsylvania in 1966. Despite his meticulous preparation of the dirt on the start line, Kyle's first run was something of an anti-climax and the twice national champ was 1.5s off the leading time of 11.89s. But the champ rose to the occasion and fired the Vincent up the hill for his second run in just 11.24s – quick enough for yet another win at the end of the day.

Kyle wrapped up another national title that year, before selling his faithful Vincent to up and coming rider, Beese Wendt. Wendt had won the Class B Championship and was looking to move up to the pro class, so the Kyle Vincent looked the perfect tool for him. And so it proved. With Kyle acting as coach and mentor, Wendt secured the Canadian Class A title in 1968 and backed that up by winning the AMA Class A title in 1969.

A decade later, Wendt was still winning on the

Vincent. This time (again at Freemansburg) Wendt recorded one of his last wins on the bike – and this time *Cycle News* were there to observe: 'The best ride of the day, by far, belonged to two-time national champ Beese Wendt. Beese rode his Vincent V-twin flawlessly over the 500ft three-breaker Freemansburg cliff for an 8.55sec 750cc

Pro [class] winning climb.'

Bonhams are offering the bike in as-last-raced condition, with Ceriani forks, twin Kayaba gas rear shocks and a lengthened swingarm. The original BSA pistons have been replaced with Venolia race pistons, there are Chrysler Hemi valves, three Black Lightning primary clutch plates with a left-foot lever to engage the clutch for the start so Wendt could keep both hands firmly on the 'bars. It's being sold with its AMA trophies and hand-written notes by Glen Kyle that form part of an extensive history file. The bike's estimate is \$50,000-60,000 (£38,000-46,000). 

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RARITY



A self-made Maico

Pete Griffith created his bike from one built when he started off-road racing – in 1954

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIAN CRICHTON

ABOVE: 'Griff' racing the Maico special that he rebuilt from a 1954 250B Blizzard road bike

OCTOGENERIAN PETE GRIFFITH is proof that people don't stop pursuing dreams because they grow old, they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams. Pete, 82 this year, stays youthful by racing – and he can't wait to get cracking on another classic motocross season racing his 1954 250 Maico.

This German stroker is surely the world's oldest Maico currently in active competition. And Pete is the oldest competitor in the Pre-65 MX Club – and possibly on the whole current classic MX scene in the UK.

'Griff' first raced off-road 65 years ago, in the year his Maico was built, and has missed only three seasons since then – due to national service and getting married.

Ten years ago, he decided his 500cc BSA Gold Star was becoming too heavy to handle for the several rides in one day that classic events lay on for riders, and started looking for a lighter two-stroke for the Pre-60 class. A Maico was foremost in his mind, and as the German factory's off-road models of the 1950s were mainly road-based, he was after a road bike to modify as a budget project. Maicos from the '50s are thin on the ground in the UK, so he looked to Germany via

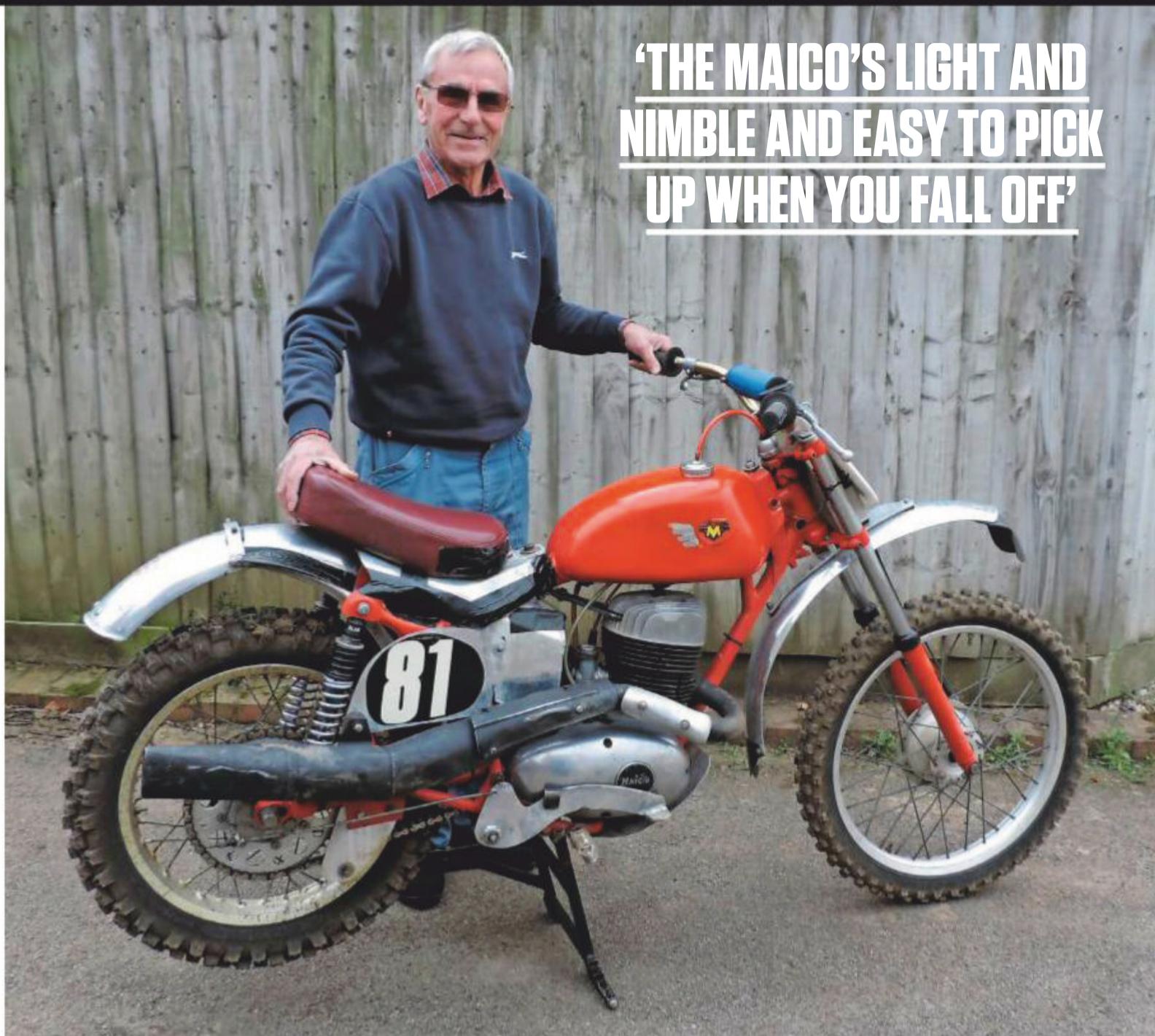
eBay. In 2011 he spotted a rough-looking 1954 250B Blizzard that had been left outdoors for 20 years.

Pete's partner Marje has a daughter, Jo, who lives in Germany, so she was asked to take a look. The seller was asking 450 euros. Jo, obviously a canny negotiator, bought it for 350.

"That was about £310 at the time," says Griff. It sounds cheap, but plenty of work was needed to make it a viable competition mount, including replacement wheels, forks and tank. It was stripped down, the road parts discarded, the frame strengthened, and the cylinder head filled and re-machined to convert from side plug to central plug with squish band to cope with higher 13:1 compression. The standard four-speed gearbox was retained, a full set of gears being donated by period Maico spares specialist Gekra Motors of Holland, from whom Pete bought most of his other parts.

To fit a rear 4.00 x 18 knobbly, the swingarm had to be lengthened an inch to get the tyre in. This and frame strengthening work were entrusted to friend and fellow scrambler Roy Abbott. The bike was no concours winner, but it was fit for battle for the 2012 season.

'THE MAICO'S LIGHT AND NIMBLE AND EASY TO PICK UP WHEN YOU FALL OFF'



LEFT: Griff enjoyed carrying out the conversion, which included a full stripdown and engine/frame work

Since then, Griff has ridden his Blizzard special more times than any of his other motocross bikes. In 2017 he celebrated his 80th birthday by winning the Pre-65 Club's Pre-60 class championship on his mature Maico.

"I enjoyed doing the conversion, and I like the Maico because it's light and nimble and easy to pick up when you fall off," says Griff, who gave everyone a laugh at the start of the 2019 season. He fell off at the Pre-65 opening round at Malinsea, Essex, and was briefly concussed. When he regained consciousness, the doctor, trying to assess his mental state, asked him a few questions, including: "Who is the prime minister?"

Griff looked up: "Margaret Thatcher," he said.

That response caused mirth through the paddock – which spread throughout classic MX ranks across countrywide, because Pete is an institution and well loved for his selfless devotion to the sport over the

decades. He's currently chairman of the Northampton Classic Club (which he founded seven years ago) and president of the modern Northampton Club.

"At least I got the right sex," says Griff, referring to his dazed response at Malinsea (Theresa May was prime minister at the time). "They took me to Cheltenham hospital," he adds. "I was a bit shaken up, but thankfully no broken bones. They gave me a head scan. 'Can you find anything?' I asked them."

He took six weeks off after the accident, missing the second round of the Pre-65 club series. But he still managed nine events in 2019, scoring a win and several top three places. He finished the season third in the Pre-65 Club's Pre-60 championship class and second in the Pre-60 two-stroke class. Griff specialises in excellent starts... and he usually stays on. "Anyone can go fast and fall off," he says.

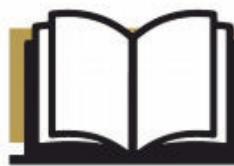
Those nine meetings included the British Bike Bonanza in which Griff gives his beloved 500 BSA Gold Star its annual outing. He's had countless offers to buy it, some very generous, but he turns them all down.

As soon as he finished his last race in 2019 he stripped his Maico down to check the frame and the engine, ready for 2020. He doesn't like to leave preparation to the start of the season. So he's all set for 2020 and raring to go, both as rider and organiser of Classic Club events and helper at modern club events.

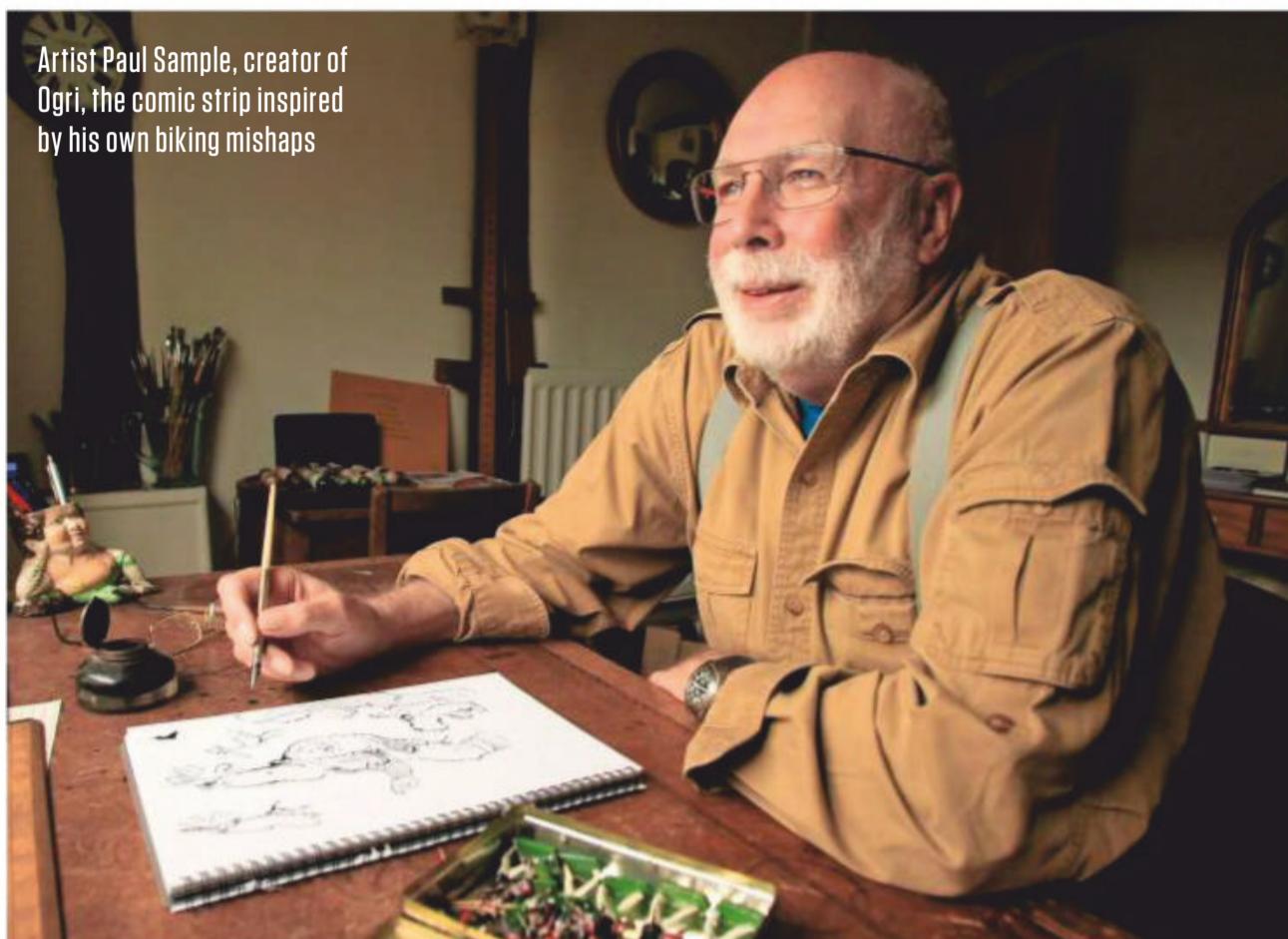
While his partner Marje isn't a bike lover she helps at Griff organised events by lap scoring and carrying out general duties. She knows how much motocross means to him. "If he stopped I'd have to shoot him," she says.



LEFT: The bike as found in Germany. It only cost 350 euros, but needed a lot of work to turn it into a competitive motocross machine



Artist Paul Sample, creator of Ogri, the comic strip inspired by his own biking mishaps



OGRI RIDES ON

Biking's most famous fictional character returns in this fan's favourite book featuring 150 of his greatest cartoon strips

IMAGES COURTESY OF LAUGHING GNOME. PHOTOS BY GARRY STUART

FOR MANY OF us, the antics of cartoon character Ogri and his daft mate Malcolm were essential reading in the early days of *Bike* magazine – and now it's possible to relive some of the great Ogri moments thanks to this new book *Ogri – Everybody's Favourite*. It features 150 cartoon strips and is published by Laughing Gnome.

Ogri was created by artist Paul Sample. He is best known in the book trade as the cover illustrator of Tom Sharpe's *Wilt* novels, but bikers identify with the amazing body of Ogri cartoon strips that ran from 1972 until 2013 – first as a regular in *Bike* magazine, then in custom bike mag *Back Street Heroes* and even enjoying a short stint in the motoring section of the *Telegraph*.

Paul Sample said: "Ogri started as a drawing in one of my sketchbooks when I was at art college in 1966 – it was the year when I began riding motorcycles, having bought one to get about, rather than using the bus.

"Then Ogri developed into a strip cartoon from my riding experience and lack of expertise in keeping the rubber bits of the bike on the tarmac. *Bike* magazine liked the stories, and Ogri started appearing in the publication in 1972. I never thought

Ogri would last so long. By the way, the dog, Kickstart, was real. He used to ride on my petrol tank, race me back home from the pub, and was a generally disreputable character. Great fun as an inspiration on life."

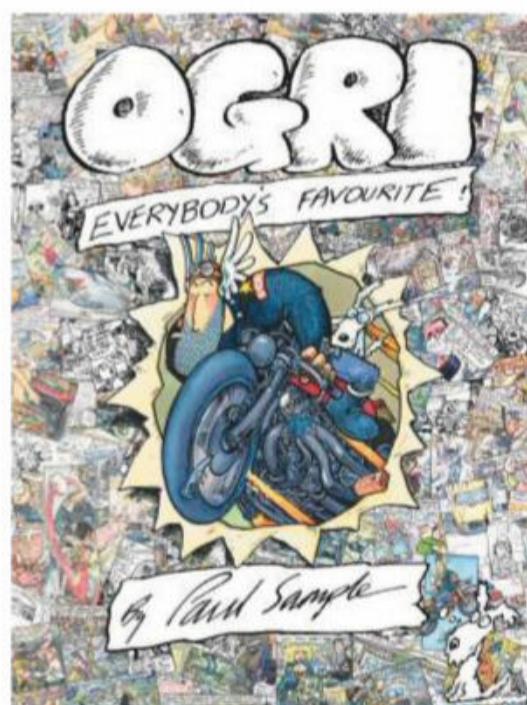
Sample finally retired in 2013, but with 450 numbered strips and numerous single-panel illustrations, Ogri's legend lives on. In 2017 Laughing Gnome published a private subscription edition of Sample's Ogri cartoon strips called

Now to Make My Getaway; The Complete Compendium of all the Ogri strip cartoons 1972-2013, the print run of which sold out. The book weighed a whopping 4.5kg!

Now, the publisher has compiled this latest compendium – a lighter, slimmer and considerably more 'aerodynamic' volume, featuring the 150 most popular strips, as selected by crowd-sourced nominations from the character's tens of thousands of fans around the world.

The book also features an interview with Paul Sample in which he describes the creative process, as well as never-before-seen illustrations drawn from his private sketchbooks.

We love it, so here's a taster strip from the book... ☺



Ogri – Everybody's Favourite • The 150 greatest strips, as selected by fans • By Paul Sample • ISBN: 978-1-9161879-0-0
Format: Paperback, 320 x 240mm, 176pp • Publication date: November 25, 2019 • Price: £24.99

OGRI

By Paul Sample

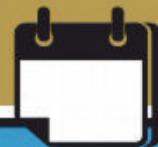
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I FOUND IN A QUARRY PIT!
GONNA RUN IT ON METHS AN'
COOKIN' OIL! HAD A FEW
PROBLEMS THOUGH... LIKEDME



A black and white comic strip panel. At the top, a speech bubble contains the text "...APART FROM THAT EVERYTHING WENT TOGETHER PRETTY WELL...". Below this, a man with a mustache and a determined expression is working on a car engine. He is shouting "PERFECT!" with a large, expressive hand gesture. The engine parts are reacting with various sound effects: "HONK!" (from a horn), "GRR!" (from a flywheel), "WAP!" (from a piston), "BEND!" (from a connecting rod), and "PLOP!" (from a cylinder). The scene is filled with mechanical details like oil cans, wrenches, and a flywheel. The man is wearing a dark shirt and trousers, and his hair is flying upwards in a cloud of dust or steam.

A black and white comic strip panel. In the center, a motorcycle is being assembled. A speech bubble from the top left contains the text: "JUS' GOTTA BOLT THE ENGINE IN PLACE USING A FEW MECCANO STRUTS TO KEEP IT SOLID ...!". To the left, a sign on a wall reads "GODIVA TRUCK FIRE ENGINE". The motorcycle is surrounded by various tools and mechanical parts, including a wrench, a screwdriver, and some nuts and bolts. The style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century comic book art.

A black and white comic panel depicting a chaotic scene. In the center, a character with a mustache and a beret is shouting. The word 'BAM!' is written in large, bold letters above them. Other sound effects like 'BRAK!', 'COFF!', 'GONKA!', 'GLUNK!', 'ZOOM!', 'BOP! BOP!', and 'RATTLE RATTLE' are scattered throughout the scene. A speech bubble from the top right says, "OH WOW! THIS IS JUST TOO MUCH!!! FANTASTIC!! BROOK! BROOK!"



DIARY



LONDON MOTORCYCLE SHOW FEB 14 - 16

Classics in the capital

Yet more classics sign up for MCN's London spectacular.

IT'S HERE – the eagerly-anticipated Carole Nash MCN London Motorcycle Show is finally upon us. And, for classic fans, there's even more good news, with the announcement that the National Motorcycle Museum are bringing a selection of their ex-works BSA and Triumph triple racers to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the Rob North-framed world-beaters (see page 25).

You'll be able to find them in the Bonhams Classic Zone – along with yet more classic

raceware on Bonhams' own display which will be showcasing a number of the bikes from the world-famous Morbidelli collection that'll be going under the hammer at their Spring Stafford sale. Don't miss the stunning display of ex-Barry Sheene bikes, either – or the official launch of the 2020 Classic TT.

Plus, there's live racing action from the Michelin Thunderdrome, a massive retail zone and much more. You can't afford to miss it mcnmotorcycleshow.com



FEB 1 - 2

Bristol fashion

Dress up and head along to the first big classic show of the year

It's the 40th Bristol Classic Motorcycle Show this February, according to the organisers, and, to mark the occasion, there'll be a special '70s and '80s-themed birthday celebration at the event. Traders and clubs are being urged to enter into the spirit of things by wearing period clothing – and there's even to be a £100 prize for the 'best dressed' visitor each day. Now that's asking for trouble...

Luckily, there'll also be some great bikes, as usual, as well as a large indoor and outdoor autojumble and a classic bike auction, conducted by Charterhouse, which takes place on Sunday (viewing Saturday). bristolclassicbikeshow.com

FEB 15 - 16

Dishing the dirt

Can't wait for the season to start? Lead yourself into temptation right here...

This is the only show in town for classic off-road fans. America's first (and only) world trials champion Bernie Schreiber – whose radical riding style revolutionised the sport – is one of the guests of honour this year. The other is West Country scrambler Bryan 'Badger' Goss, who won the British 500cc motocross championship in 1970 and later became the UK's Maico importer. Both men should be well worth listening to during their on-stage sessions with veteran commentator and motocross fan Jack Burnicle.

The rest of the show should be equally fascinating, with a good mix of motocross, trials and enduro machinery on display, as well as the odd grass-tracker and speedway bike. There are even a few road racers on show. It's the place where the classic off-road trade gathers, too – and there's an outdoor autojumble for those who prefer their bargains in the raw. classicdirtbikeshow.co.uk



EVENT LISTINGS

JANUARY

24-26 International Island Classic, Phillip Island Circuit, Australia phillipislandcircuit.com.au

26 Malvern Drive-in Classic Car and Bike Autojumble, Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire classicshows.org

FEBRUARY

1-2 Carole Nash Bristol Classic Motorcycle Show, Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset bristolclassicbikeshow.com

9 Golden Valley Classic Motorcycle Club Trial, Climperwell, near Stroud, Gloucestershire gvmcc.club

12 British Bike Night at The Ace Cafe, Stonebridge, London london.acecafe.com

16 Huddersfield Autojumble, Old Market Building, Brook Street, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. phoenixfairs.jimdo.com

MARCH

7-8 MCN Scottish Motorcycle Show, Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh. scottishmotorcyleshow.com

8 Classic Bike Day, Ace Cafe, Stonebridge, London london.acecafe.com

29 South of England Classic Motorcycle Show and Bikejumble, The South of England Showground, Ardingly, West Sussex elkpromotions.co.uk

APRIL

13 Ashford Classic Motorcycle Show and Bikejumble, Ashford Market, Kent elkpromotions.co.uk

25/26 Carole Nash International Classic Motorcycle Show, Stafford County Showground, Staffordshire. classicbikeshows.com

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DISCOVER
THE DIFFERENCE



ABOVE: Allan on the 1968 Norton Commando Fastback 20M3 that's his regular ride around The Big Apple

BELOW: The bike as it was when Allan bought it

My New York times

Allan Tannenbaum, the photojournalist who visited the Norton and Ducati factories in 1972 (see last month's *CB*) reveals his own Norton ride

THE FIRST BRITISH bike I ever rode was a Norton Atlas in 1967 – and I was hooked. In 1970 I bought a new Commando Roadster at Comerford's in Surrey. I rode this bike around England and then to Paris, over the Pyrenees to Barcelona, took the ferry to Ibiza, and then back. I then took the bike home to New York where I had it for three years until a red-light runner totalled it out from under me.

In the '90s my younger brother had a motorcycle restoration business in West Virginia and he called me when he found a 1968 Commando basket case – one of the first 200 built according to the owner, with matching engine and frame numbers. I paid for the bike and the restoration commenced. Alas, my brother tired of the business and the unfinished bike languished in his basement for many years. I was too busy with my profession to deal with it. But when my brother called in 2015 to tell me he was moving, I realised it was now or never. I drove to his place, rented a trailer, and brought the bike and its parts back to New York City. It was much worse than I remembered it.

The rebuild was done at 6th Street Specials in Manhattan. Not a concours restoration, which would have been cost-prohibitive and time-consuming, but good enough for

reliable riding without the worry of road hazards spoiling something on the machine. Superblend bearings were installed in the lower end, new swingarm bushes were installed, and a host of other things were done to make the bike fast, safe, reliable and good looking.

I spent a lot of time making sure that the bike was as correct in a stock look as possible, and got into polishing cases and other parts to spiff her up. Now I've got a bike that's fun to ride and show off.

Allan Tannenbaum, New York, USA





THE WAY WE WERE

RIDING ON THE MEMORIES OF CLASSIC BIKE READERS



David's mother-in-law Gladys in the days when 'courting' meant going out for a ride on the bike



The generation game

David Andrews' motorcycling in-laws help him win this month's VMCC membership

THOUGHT YOU MIGHT be interested in these photos of my wife's family's biking past. Above is my mother-in-law Gladys during her courting days with her husband-to-be Denis Bowern sitting on, I believe, a BSA 500 or 350 from the 1930s. Next to that is a photo of Denis with son Keith and his other daughter Barbara on his Panther combination, the wheel of which he had to rebuild during a day trip to the coast with mum, dad, three children and the dog on board. On the right is my wife Janice, her mother Gladys and daughter-in-law-to-be Linda on my wife's brother Keith's BSA Thunderbolt outfit, discussing who is going to drive.

David Andrews



ABOVE: Father-in-law and ace wheel rebuilder Denis
LEFT: Jockeying for position on the Thunderbolt outfit

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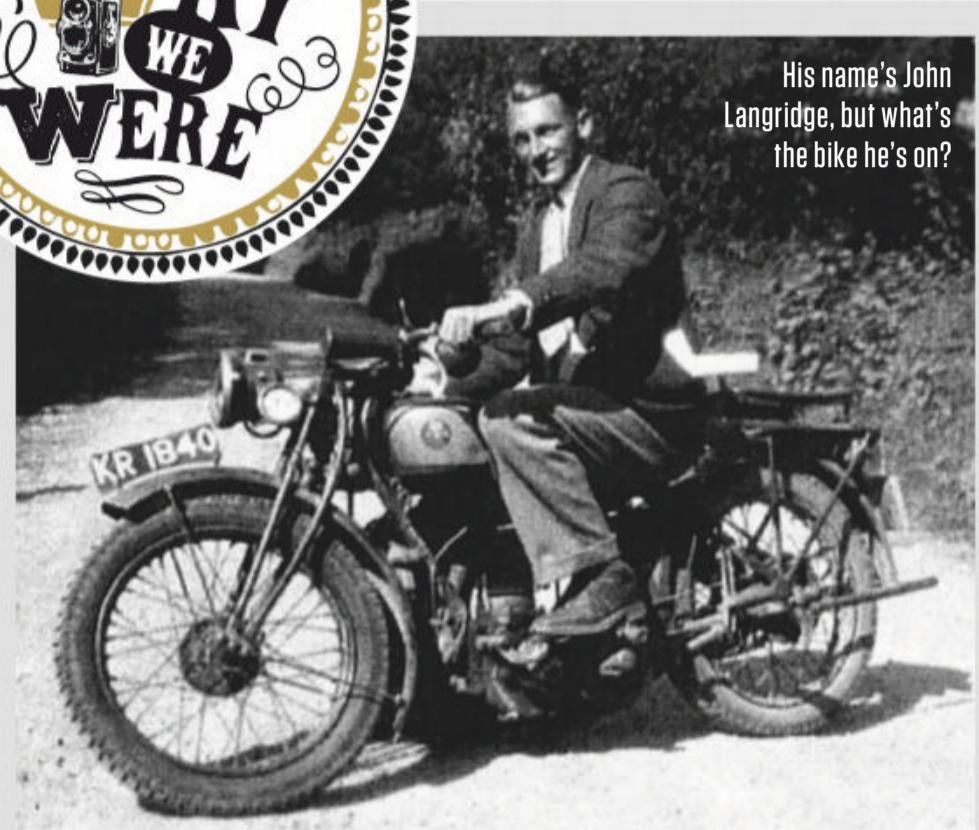
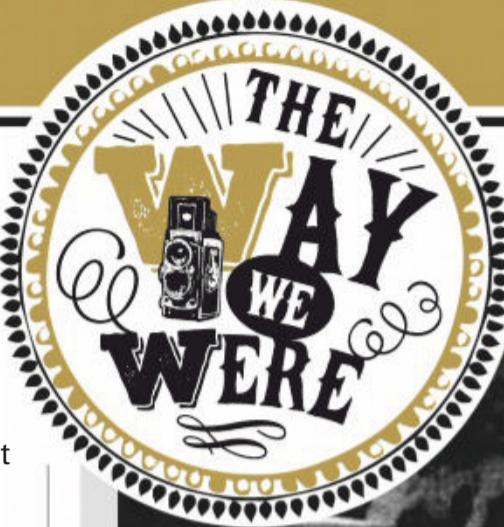
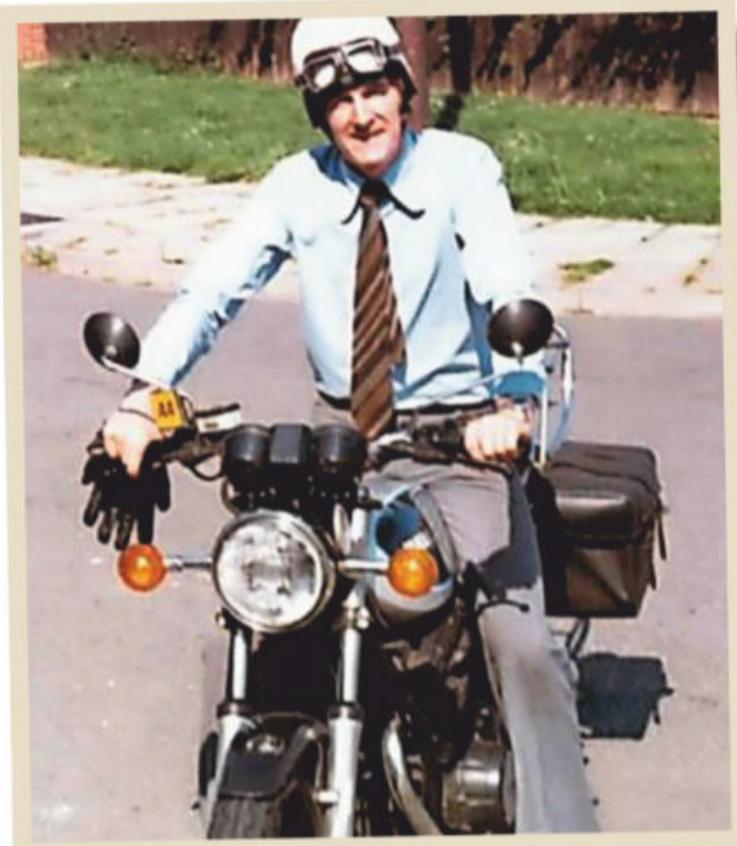
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DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION

Taken outside my mum and dad's house in Doncaster during the late summer of 1977, this is a picture of me on my Yamaha XS750 triple. The bike was bought new from Cusworth's in Doncaster. My wife-to-be and I went to the motorcycle show at Earls Court in London. At the time, we owned a Triumph Daytona, which seemed to include an agreement with Castrol to leak at least three pints of oil every week! Gill and I walked around the show and she asked me which bike didn't leak oil. The shaft-drive XS750 stood out and I pointed it out to her. Within the week, we had placed a deposit on one with Cusworth's and picked it up shortly afterwards. It did not leak oil – ever! We could even ride around on it 'dressed up', knowing we'd finish our journey looking as pristine as we'd started! I'm now 72 and the proud owner of a 1959 500cc Velocette Venom and a 2000 Royal Enfield Bullet – both oil-tight!

John Swapp



His name's John Langridge, but what's the bike he's on?

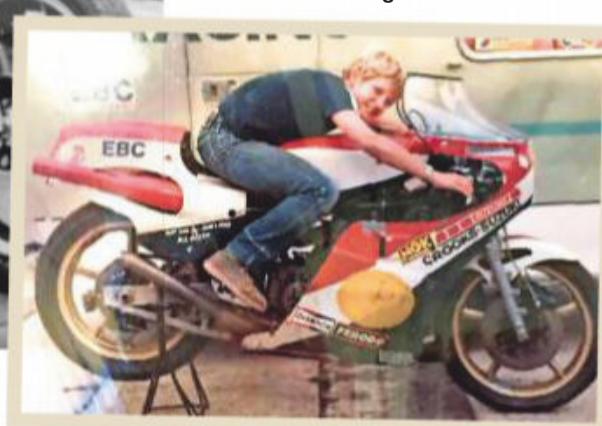
MYSTERY MAN ON A MYSTERY MACHINE

A friend of my son approached me to ask if I could help to identify the bike featured in this photo. All the information I have is that the rider is John Langridge, he was born in 1939 and he rode the bike to his work, as estate manager at Bayham Abbey in Kent.

Roy Glasspool



Hi Roy, that's a Triumph NSD 550cc side-valve, registered in Kent in 1930. It's the same number-series as the Triumph CSD I rebuilt in CB a few years back, which is registered KR 44. While the CSD was also a 550cc side-valve, it was a new design, whereas the NSD was based around older 1920s parts – the engine harked back to the flat-tank Model P (Triumph's sales-winning budget model of the mid-'20s) making the NSD a cheaper, but more lightweight model. Cheers, Rick P



HERE'S SOME I OWNED EARLIER...

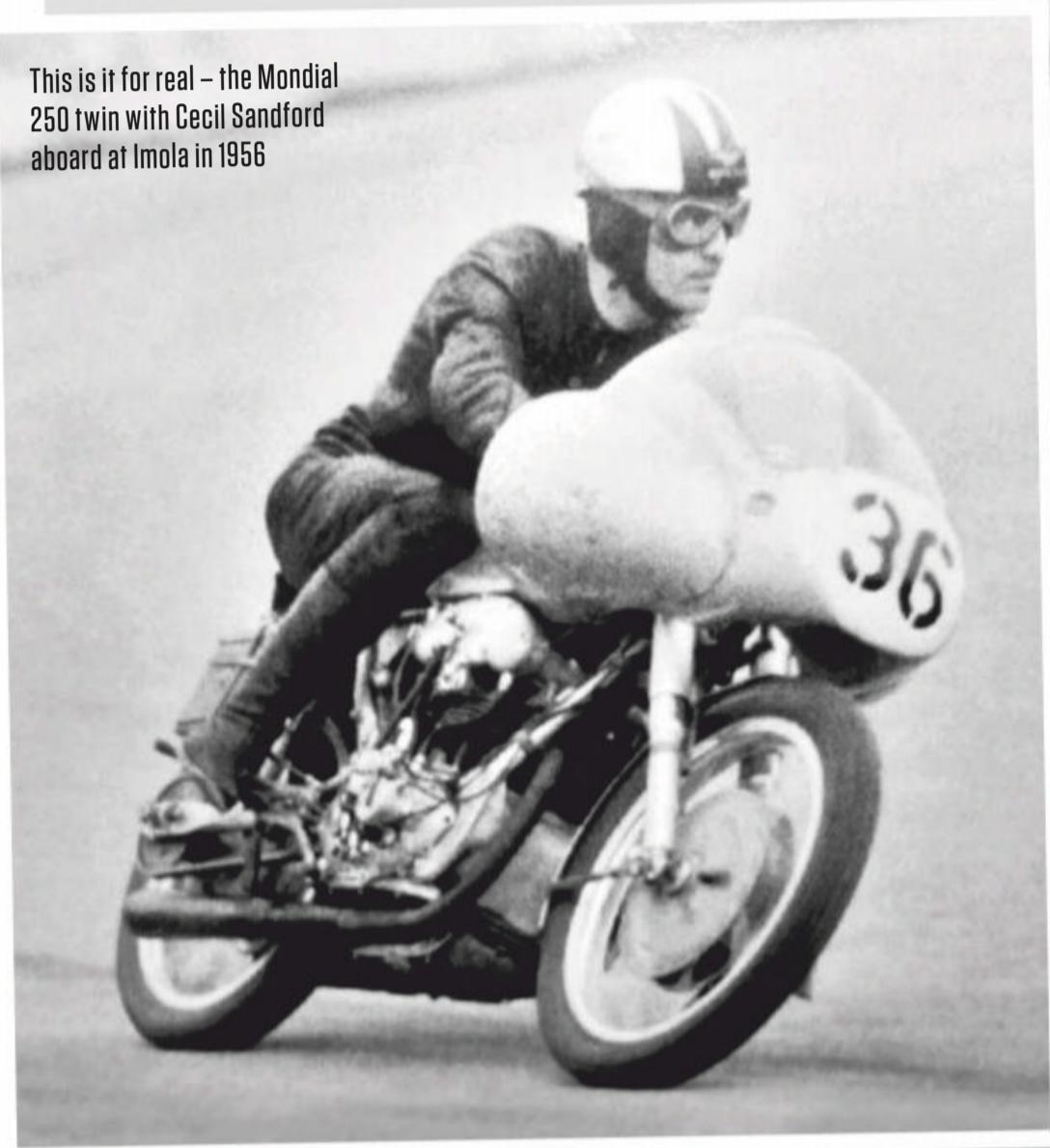
Grant Holmes, who has just finished restoring a Honda CB77 (see last month's Your Classics) also sent in these pics of two of his old bikes. He says: 'I bought the RD350LC from a friend who had a crash on it – it wasn't his fault, but he suffered serious injuries to his ankle. It was a fast bike and I won a lot of races in the 500cc production class on it. It had TZ350 rods and mains, a welded crank and of course the barrels were ported and the head skimmed; the pistons were modified, too. While my brother-in-law was doing a monster wheelie on it, he over-revved the engine and the right-hand conrod snapped and went through the crankcase! I also managed to break my left elbow while riding it (I smashed it to pieces and had it pinned and wired), broke my right collar bone, thumb and wrist... otherwise it was all good fun! The other photo is of my RG500 MkIII GP bike with a young James Ford aboard.'

Grant Holmes



THE MISSING LINK

This is it for real – the Mondial 250 twin with Cecil Sandford aboard at Imola in 1956



I THOUGHT YOU might be interested in this photograph that links together two articles in the December issue of *Classic Bike*: 'At Lunch With Cecil Sandford' by Mat Oxley and the article on Lino Tonti by Alan Cathcart. The photo shows Cecil Sandford on the Mondial 250 twin in a practice session at Imola in 1956. Apparently, this is the only known picture of the Mondial 250 twin being ridden on track in period. It was never raced by Mondial but, as Alan says, it was taken over by Tonti and Pattoni in 1958/59, becoming the basis of the first Paton 250 racer.

The print was copied from the book *Mondial Racers* by Gianni Perrone and Jolanda Croesi, published by Giorgio Nada Editore. The bike in the main opening shot of the CB Tonti article is not the twin that was entered at Monza in 1959 and ridden by Giampiero Zubani – it's a 175/250 single that could be the one ridden by Gilberto Milani at Monza GP in 1959.

Terry Birch, Bulwell

He's completely right – Terry always is! I've never met him in all the 30-plus years he's been writing in to CB and other classic mags, mainly about Italian bikes, but he has an encyclopaedic knowledge and is always very appreciative. The photo of Sandford on the Mondial twin is gold dust! I didn't know he'd ridden it, but as you can clearly see, it was a horrid thing – far too big and heavy for the 250 class! Alan Cathcart

Apologies for the incorrect captioning of the opening shot in the December Tonti feature. It was down to a last-minute picture change and a failure to change the caption accordingly. My fault! Mark Holmes

OSSA SPOTTER

The December issue of *CB* featured a picture of Santiago Herrero on his Ossa racer in the Letters pages, where Terry Birch was asking where the single-cylinder monocoque machine is now. Two of these monocoque frames were built – but Herrero only raced one, with an air-cooled engine, as Terry said in his letter. The owner of this bike is Jaime Alguersuari Snr, a former Grand Prix motorcycle racer and editor of the magazine *Solo Moto* amongst others, and father of ex-Formula One driver



Jaime Alguersuari. The second of these monocoque frames was fitted with a 250cc single-cylinder water-cooled Ossa engine, built to improve on the performance of the air-cooled engine. I don't know who the owner is, but I saw it many years ago in the Basella Motorcycle Museum in Lleida, northern Spain – I enclose a picture of it that I took during that visit. I hope this helps, Terry.

Telmo Aparicio, Spain



LEFT: Santiago Herrero onboard his Ossa racer in 1969
ABOVE: The later water-cooled version in Basella Museum

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO
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classic.bike@bauermedia.co.uk



Barry's Bond rubbed shoulders with the 2CVs at Rungis in 1969

REMEMBERING RUNGIS

Regarding the Rungis 'Grand Prix' featured in the December issue, I went to this event with two pals. It was my first time abroad and we went in my Bond 875 three-wheeler, of which I enclose a picture (above).

I enjoyed reminiscing while reading your brilliant article. We came back with Bill Crook, Ken Arthur & Co, collecting Charlie Williams from the waiting room at Calais. Ken's van dropped a valve on M6 near Birmingham Airport – and the Bond towed him off the motorway! Happy days!

Barry Gollings

DOWN TO A T

The Suzuki T500 buyer's guide in the December issue was interesting – I might have to upgrade my insurance if that's the value now! I've had mine about two years now; I had the engine rebuilt and it's a great bike. It doesn't smoke, either... until you get to about 70mph! John Walton



John's well pleased with his T500 – and its current value

Sammy Miller with his 1967 340cc prototype Jawa racer



TOP BANANA

It's always great to read *Classic Bike* – and the December issue was certainly an interesting one, with the banana-frame Jawa in Gary's 'Welcome'! We have a racing edition in the Sammy Miller Museum, and I have attached a photo of the bike (above). Its details are: 1967 prototype production racer, 340cc single-cylinder two-stroke (bore 78mm, stroke 71mm), five-speed gearbox. This rare prototype was demonstrated by Graham Head at the 1996 TT parade, where he reported a very fast and good handling bike. Keep up all the good work!

Sammy Miller, MBE

BROUGH TREATMENT

I've just read the article about the new Brough Superior in the November issue, and I'm afraid to admit it has one of the ugliest engines I have ever seen. If they had made the angle of the cylinders more like the original, it would have made it a far better-looking engine – and they could have made the wheelbase much shorter. And don't even get me started about the four exhausts...

Pete Crawford



A close-up of the modern Brough in all its V-twin glory

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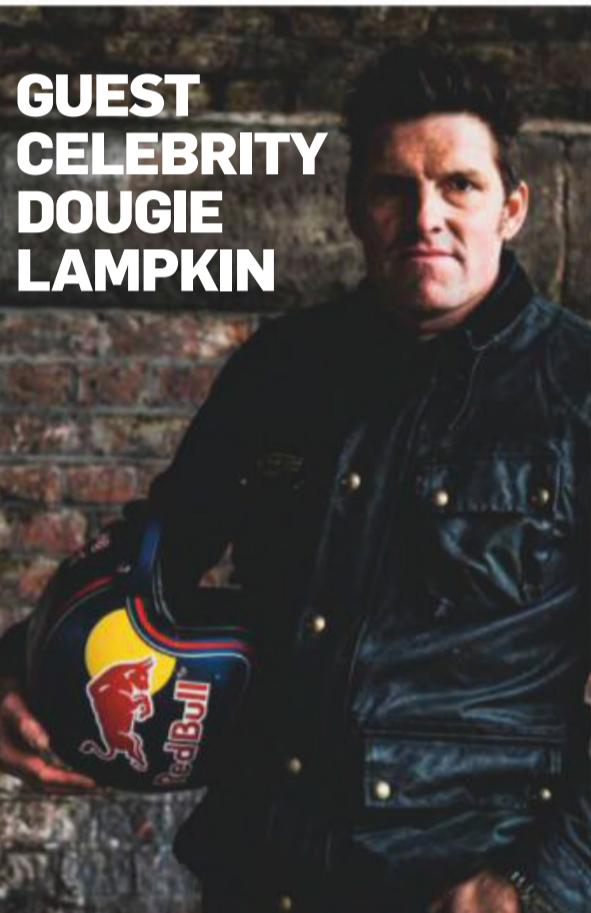
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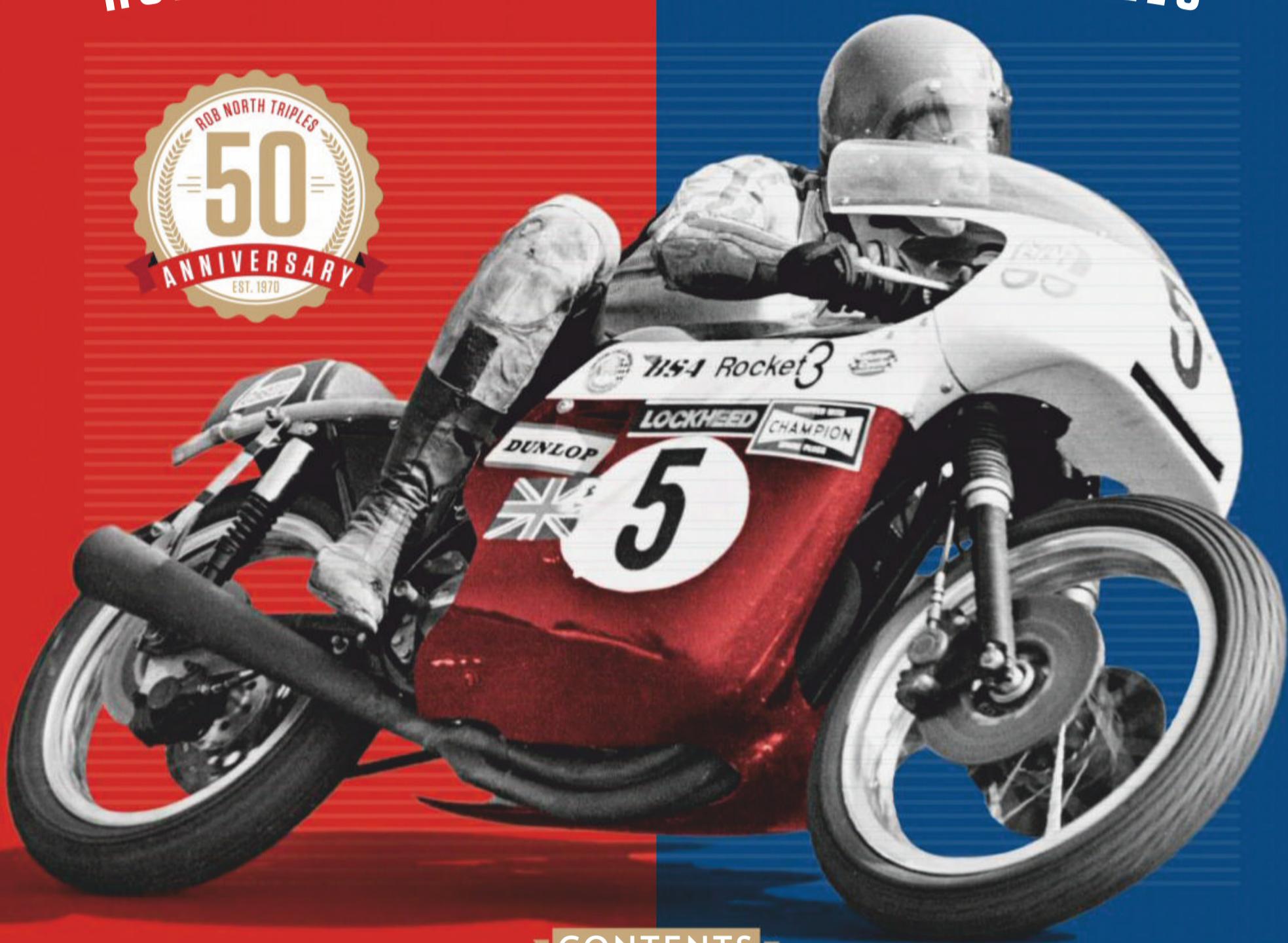
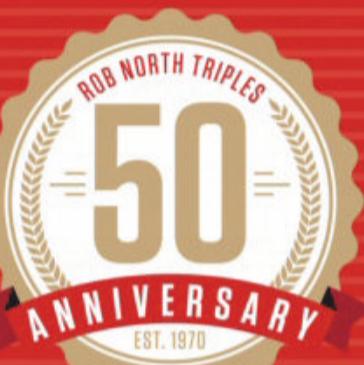
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ROAD TEST
Rob North roadster ridden



BORN FOR THE USA

The factory Rob North triples made their racing debut 50 years ago at Daytona. Successes followed later, thanks to a team of top riders and a series of developments

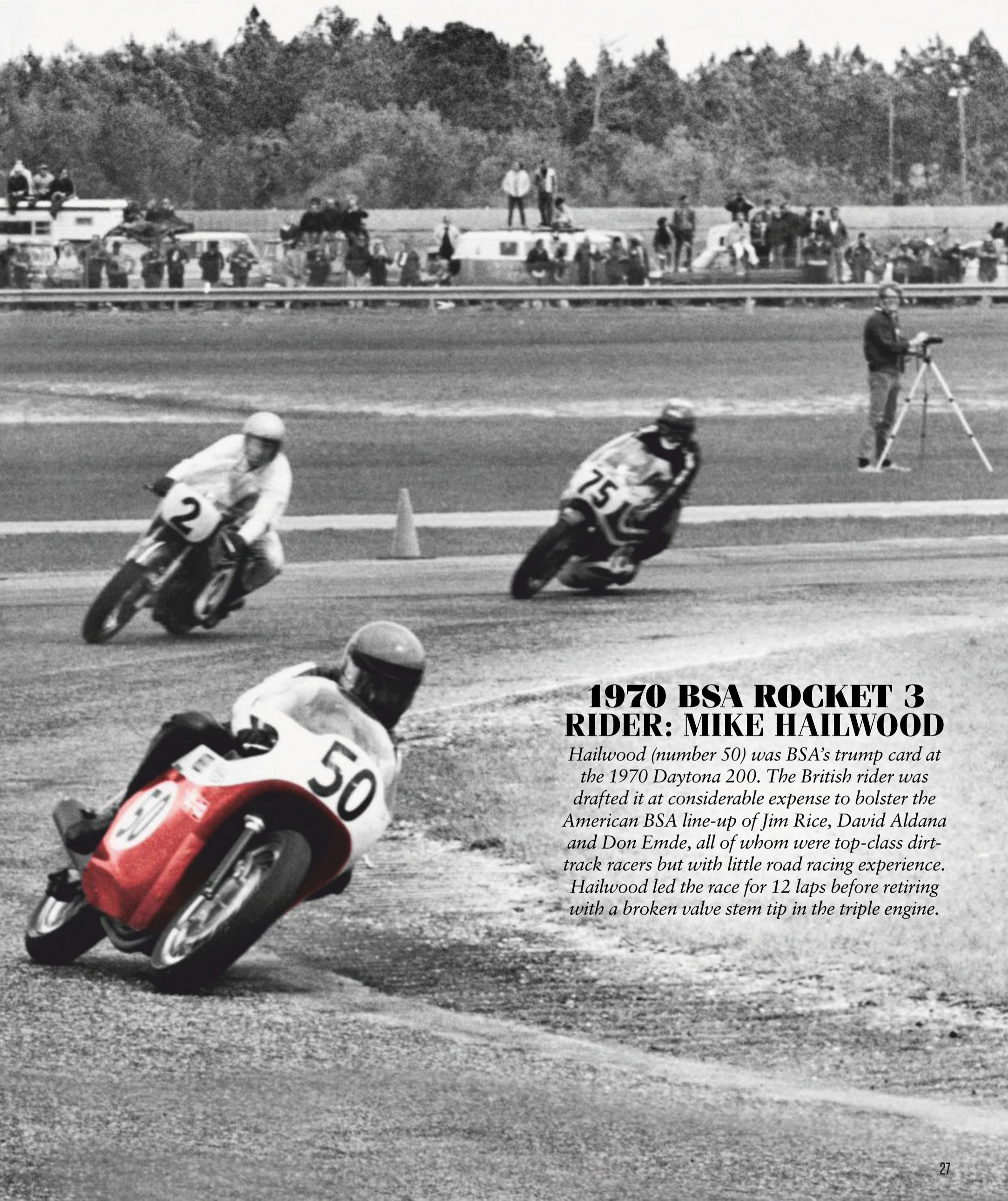
WORDS: ALAN CATHCART PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY MARGERUM AND BAUER ARCHIVE

In October 1969 the Triumph factory's Head of Development, Doug Hele, was entrusted with the task of developing a racing version of the company's new T150 Trident three-cylinder superbike, which had been launched the previous year. The pressure was on, because he had to have six bikes on the grid for the Daytona 200 the following March – just four months away!

Three of the bikes were to be Triumphs, but the other three would be BSAs, to reflect the fiercely competitive rivalry between the two brands in the BSA Group, each of which had its own competition department. ▶



DAYTONA 1970: Mike Hailwood (BSA Rocket 3) leads Gary Nixon (Triumph Trident), Cal Rayborn (Harley-Davidson), Dick Mann (Honda CB750) and Kel Carruthers (Yamaha 350)



1970 BSA ROCKET 3 RIDER: MIKE HAILWOOD

Hailwood (number 50) was BSA's trump card at the 1970 Daytona 200. The British rider was drafted in at considerable expense to bolster the American BSA line-up of Jim Rice, David Aldana and Don Emde, all of whom were top-class dirt-track racers but with little road racing experience. Hailwood led the race for 12 laps before retiring with a broken valve stem tip in the triple engine.



Hele had designed the 741cc inline three-cylinder overhead-valve engine which powered the BSA Rocket 3 and Triumph T150 Trident over the winter of 1963/64, working on a drawing board in his home during his own free time and completely unaided. So the chance to develop a racing version of his motor, and clad it in a full-race chassis to go racing at the highest level, gave him particular satisfaction. The decision to fund a racing programme was the direct

result of a rule change in AMA Grand National racing in the USA, the British firm's largest market. Until 1969 ohv and ohc engines had been restricted to 500cc, while side-valves (ie Harley-Davidsons) could be 750cc. It wasn't until 1970 that the AMA removed this restriction for road racing, which gave the British triples a competitive edge Stateside.

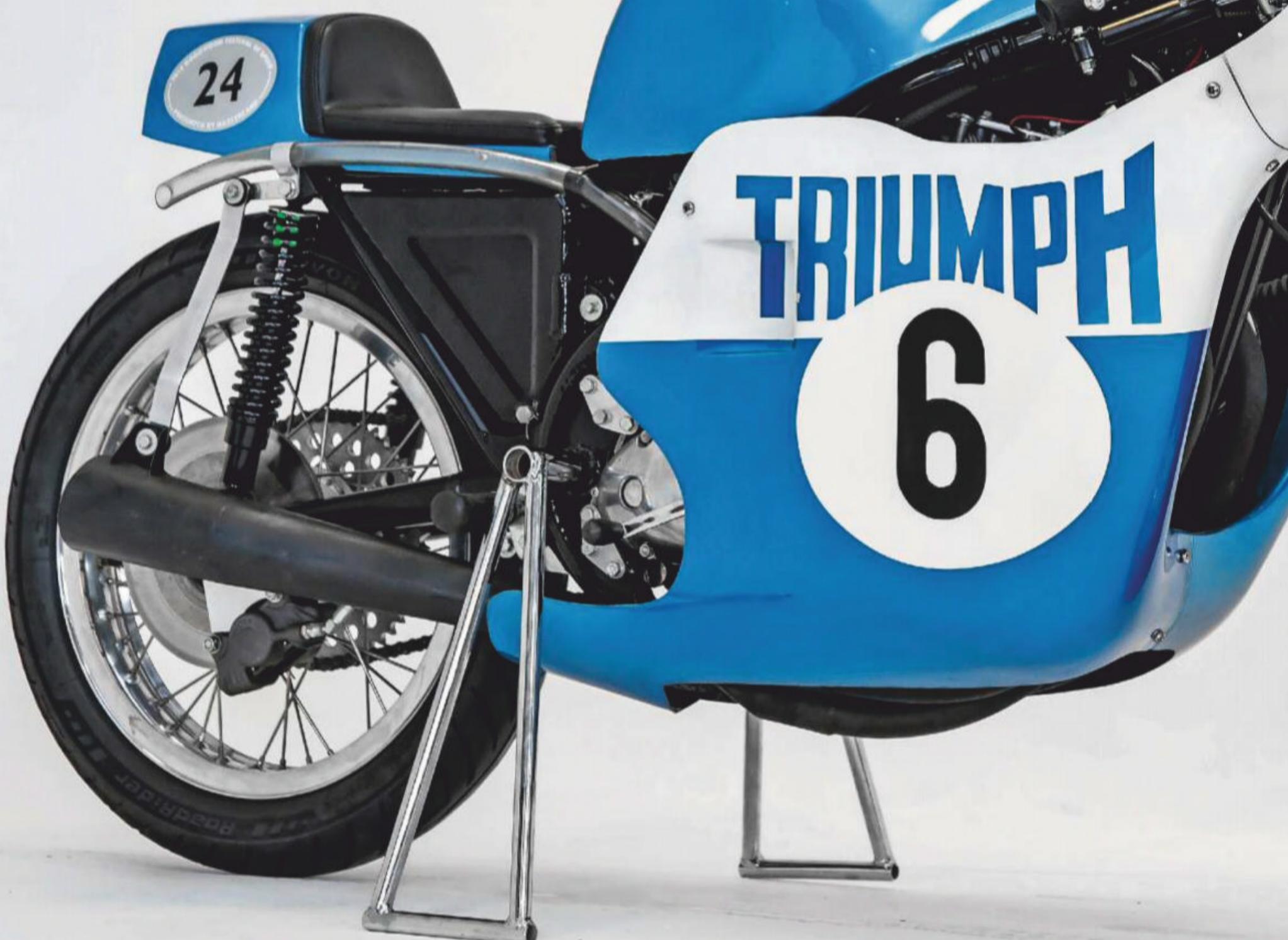
The British factory concentrated on developing the three-cylinder engines, and delegated construction of racing frames to specialist fabricator Robin 'Rob' North, whose shop was just ten miles from the Meriden factory (see Rob North interview on page 34).

He had already built frames for Triumph tester Percy Tait, including one with a three-cylinder motor. This formed the basis of the six factory triples for Daytona, with the Triumphs all ridden by Americans (Gene Romero, Don Castro and Gary Nixon) and three BSAs for Dave Aldana, Jim Rice and the legendary Mike Hailwood, coaxed back from cars to bikes via a large cheque, for what he declared would be his last-ever bike race.

After leading the race, Hailwood retired at one-quarter distance with a broken valve stem tip in ◊

LEFT: Ray Pickrell was a regular Rob North triple racer

'AN AMA RULE CHANGE PROMPTED THE TRIPLE RACING PROGRAMME'



RIGHT: The factory Triumph team at Daytona, 1971. Left to right: Gene Romero, Don Castro, Tom Rockwood, Gary Nixon and Paul Smart



All the machines pictured in colour in this feature are exhibits at the National Motorcycle Museum. They will also form the centrepiece of the NMM special Rob North-framed BSA/Triumph triples display at the Carole Nash MCN London Motorcycle Show (see preview on page 10).



1971 TRIUMPH TRIDENT RIDER: RAY PICKRELL

Although the bike is painted Triumph blue and white, this machine spent most of its life in red and white BSA livery (as below) and it features a Rocket 3 engine with inclined cylinders. Mike Hailwood raced it at Daytona in 1971, but it then became Pickrell's BSA on which he won three out of six races in the Transatlantic Races and was a major player in other F750 races that season.



Ray Pickrell lines up for the Race of the Year at Mallory Park on a BSA-branded triple. He finished third behind John Cooper and Agostini

his BSA's engine, leaving Nixon to lead until his engine also failed. The race was won by veteran Dick Mann on a Honda 750-4, with Romero a close second after crashing and remounting, and his team-mate Castro third. Romero duly won the AMA title, with BSA/Triumph riders filling the top five championship places.

The debut victory for the Rob North-framed bikes came at Talladega the week after Daytona, when Aldana rode his BSA to victory on the banked Alabama track at what was then the fastest ever average speed for a 200-mile race of 104.59mph, including pit stops. Nixon won at tight and twisty Loudon on his Triumph in front of a massive crowd – the sight, and especially the sound, of the British triples with their haunting howl, was an undoubted crowd-pleaser.

In the UK, Triumph's Paul Smart smashed the Crystal Palace outright lap record to score the first of many British

'FOR 1971 THE BUDGET WAS UPPED TO ONE MILLION DOLLARS'

BSA/Triumph short-circuit race victories. Later in the year he teamed up with Tom Dickie to win the Bol d'Or 24-hour race at Monthléry on the ex-Tait triple, the first time any Brits had won the French classic.

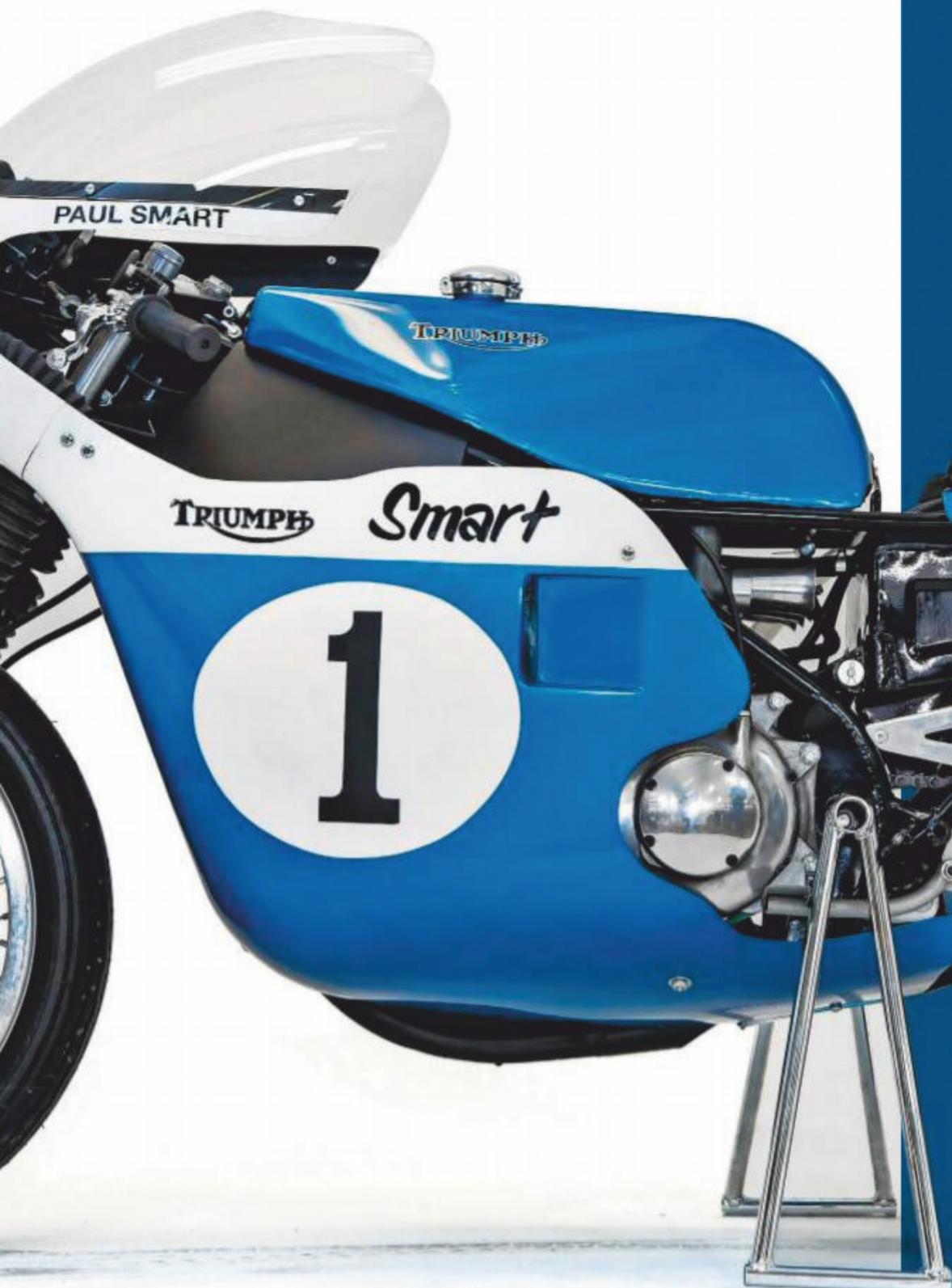
The following season, BSA/Triumph went large, upping their racing budget to a massive million dollars in a display of excessive spending which motorcycle racing had not previously seen. After shakedown races in South Africa, no less than ten of the so-called 'Beezumph' triples took to the track at Daytona, including an improved 1971 version with a lowered Rob North frame for the previous year's race winner, Dick Mann.

Hailwood, enticed back again via the usual means, was assigned a likewise-updated BSA, with similar machines under the Triumph label for Daytona debutant Paul Smart

1971 TRIUMPH TRIDENT RIDERS: RAY PICKRELL, PERCY TAIT

This bike (below) was first used by Percy Tait in practice for the 1970 Daytona 200. After crashing there, the bike was rebuilt for the 1971 Bol d'Or 24hrs at Le Mans. Tait teamed up with Ray Pickrell to win the race, despite having had a chain snap (luckily at the pit lane entrance). Evidence of the chain breakage can be seen on the seat hump and rear numberplate.





Paul Smart at Daytona, 1971: fastest qualifier but failed to finish the race

and AMA champion Romero. Triumphs of 1970-spec were provided to Nixon (racing with a leg broken just days earlier), Castro and team newcomer Tom Rockwood, with year-old BSAs for Aldana, Rice and Don Emde. Winter development had produced a 'squish' motor with extra horsepower, as well as the altered Rob North frames and improved aerodynamics thanks to the distinctive 'Letterbox' fairing, with the oil cooler now mounted ahead of the steering head. These quickly became known as 'Lowboys', with the older frames now nicknamed 'Highboys'.

The British triples dominated from the start of the event, with Paul Smart qualifying on pole. He and Hailwood were running squish motors, and pulled clear of the field. ▶

1971 TRIUMPH TRIDENT RIDER: PAUL SMART

Smart signed for Triumph in 1970 and won his first race on a Trident at Crystal Palace. His bike was the first to have the head angle altered to improve steering. Smart qualified on pole at Daytona in '71 and led most of the race before holing a piston. He won three of the six 1971 Match Races and won the Silverstone F750, setting a new outright circuit record.



Smart tries his triple for size in February 1971 as Triumph and BSA employees look on

THE RACING TRIPLES

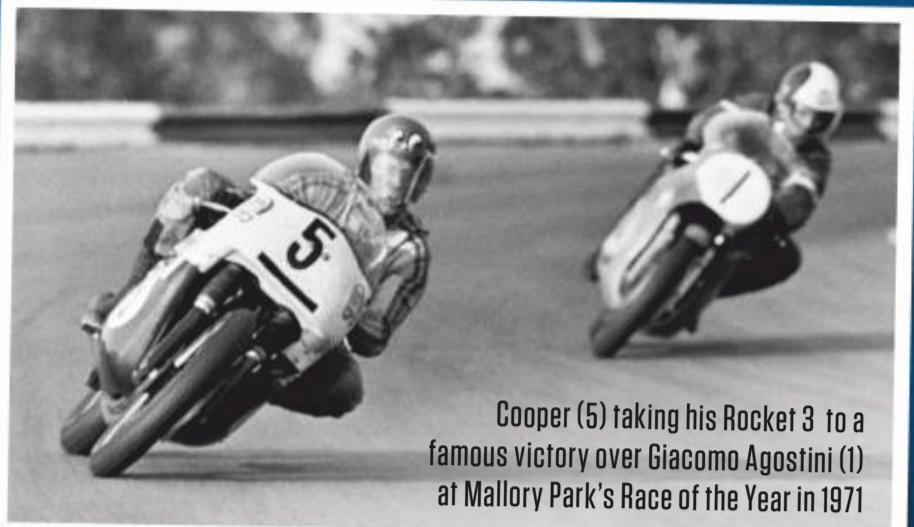
until both of them retired with ignition-related issues. This left Mann to repeat his 1970 victory – this time on a BSA – in a dominant 1-2-3 sweep for the British bikes, with Romero second for Triumph (like Mann, on a '71 Lowboy) and Emde finishing third on an older BSA Highboy.

It was a dream year for BSA/Triumph, with Mann going on to win the AMA championship, while on the UK mainland BSA-mounted John Cooper defeated serial world champion Giacomo Agostini on his 500-3 MV Agusta to win Mallory Park's Race of the Year, repeating the achievement one week later in the Race of the South at Brands. Cooper then won the lucrative Ontario 250-miler in California (consisting of two 125-mile races), while Tait and Pickrell teamed up to repeat Triumph's 1970 victory in the 24-hour Bol d'Or endurance race at Le Mans.

Sadly, though, the victory champagne was a final drink in the last-chance saloon. The BSA Group had losses amounting to £8.5 million in 1971 – £3 million alone for BSA motorcycles. It was sold to Norton owners Manganese Bronze to create Norton Villiers Triumph, which itself lasted barely another three years.

By 1975 it was all over – but by then the BSA/Triumph racing triples had already been sidelined, with the FIM's Formula 750 category being dominated by Japanese two-strokes. The day of pushrod triples – and other four-strokes – was done. It had been fun and frantic while it lasted. CB

Want to hear the glorious three-cylinder howl of BSA/Triumph racing machines. Go to this year's VMCC Mallory Park Festival of 1000 bikes on July 11-12, where there will be a special parade of 50 BSA/Triumph racing triples. That sound send the noise meter of the scale!



Cooper (5) taking his Rocket 3 to a famous victory over Giacomo Agostini (1) at Mallory Park's Race of the Year in 1971

1971 BSA ROCKET 3 RIDER: JOHN COOPER

John 'Mooneyes' Cooper first rode the BSA in the inaugural Transtatlantic Match Races held in 1971. Cooper later used it to beat Giacomo Agostini and the all-conquering MV Agusta in the Mallory Race of the Year – and repeated the feat in the Race of the South at Brands Hatch. Then he took the bike to the USA, where he won the highly-prized Ontario Spark Plug Classic.



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TUNING THE TRIPLES

Alan Cathcart explains how BSA/Triumph turned their three-cylinder production road bikes into howling, world-beating racers

PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY MARGERUM AND BAUER ARCHIVE

In developing the Triumph T150 overhead-valve three-cylinder engine for its 1970 debut season in AMA road racing, Doug Hele and the Meriden factory race department drew on experience gained with the company's 500cc twin. This had twice won the Daytona 200-miler (1966 and '67), as well as giving a good account of itself in 500GPs. With the stock 67 x 70mm 741cc triple comprising an extra cylinder hung on the side of the Triumph twin, the potential for crossover engineering was obvious.

They maxed out the stock 741cc engine to the 765cc capacity permitted under AMA rules via the maximum allowed +0.040-inch overbore, which in theory allowed damaged cylinders to be bored out and reused. This entailed honing the austenitic cast-iron liners to accept specially made high-compression 11:1 cast pistons for dimensions of 68 x 70mm, mounted on stock polished and matched conrods. These were fitted to a lightened stock 120° crankshaft (with the standard triplex-chain primary drive retained) matched to a five-speed close-ratio Quaife gearbox and a lightened single-plate Borg & Beck diaphragm clutch.

TH6 cams from the 1968 500GP twin were used with larger-radius lifters, while the stock cylinder heads fitted with tougher valve seats were carefully ported, and the combustion chamber volumes measured and matched. Three 13/16in (30mm) smooth-bore Amal GP carburettors, with a single separate float chamber feeding all three carbs, were chosen for greater power at full throttle. Ignition was a Lucas energy transfer system, with an alternator feeding remote contact breakers without the need for a heavy



US racers on BSA Highboys at Brands Hatch Transatlantic Challenge. Left to right: Don Emde, Dick Mann, David Aldana and Jim Rice

wet-cell battery, and with the three coils mounted in a separate carrier adjacent to the timing chest. The three-into-one exhaust employed a long megaphone measuring four inches wide at the exit, a system designed by Hele. The resultant engine delivered 81bhp at 8200rpm at the crankshaft.

The Rob North chassis, manufactured in his shop in Bedworth, Warwickshire, featured a bronze-welded duplex frame in Accles & Pollock T45 chrome-moly steel tubing; it carried modified Triumph 1^{5/16}in (33.3mm) telescopic forks with welded-on brake caliper plates. The first-series 1970 North frames had a tighter 26° head angle (see Rob

'THE RACE ENGINE DELIVERED 81bhp AT THE CRANKSHAFT'

North interview on page 34), which was later kicked out to 28° for the 1971 race bikes with 4.75in (121mm) of trail. Coupled with the taper-section tubular steel swingarm carrying twin Girling shocks, this resulted in a 57in (1450mm) wheelbase and a 50/50 disposition of the 396lb (180kg) half-dry weight (measured with oil but no fuel).

The 1970 bikes were fitted with a 250mm four-leading-shoe, cast magnesium Fontana front drum brake, with a single 10in (254mm) AP Lockheed cast iron disc at the rear, which transpired to be a Triumph Herald car component that had been machined down!

For 1971, the drum was replaced by twin Lockheed discs, while the steering head was lowered by two inches (51mm) for improved weight distribution. This also reduced frontal area for increased top speed, and widened the forks to provide room for disc brakes. The chassis was also lighter, scaling 35lb (16kg) in bare metal.

Besides the brake changes and the new 'Lowboy' frames for 1971, the oil cooler was also moved to the front of the new 'Letterbox' fairing, which was designed at the BSA Group's Umberslade Hall technical research establishment. The power was increased to 84bhp at 8500rpm at the crankshaft, with a new TH13 inlet camshaft, squish pistons and suitably modified heads.

Carburetors for '71 were 30mm MkI Concentrics for a smoother power delivery, while magnesium primary cases and wheel hubs, together with titanium fasteners, reduced weight. Titanium was not legal for axles, but with iron plugs fitted at each end, they passed AMA tech inspection, which consisted of poking a magnet at one end of an axle! ☺

The 1970 'Highboy' version of the racing triple had a Fontana front drum brake



Left: Three 30mm smooth-bore Amal GP carbs provided greater power at full throttle



Right: Don Castro at the Daytona 200 in 1970 on a 'Highboy' Triumph Trident

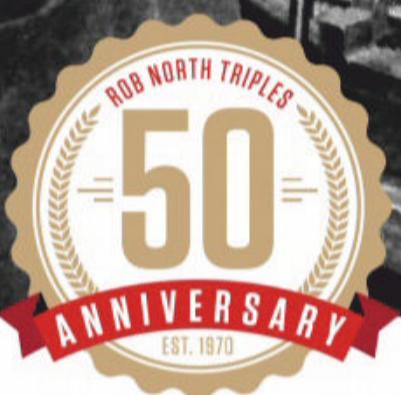
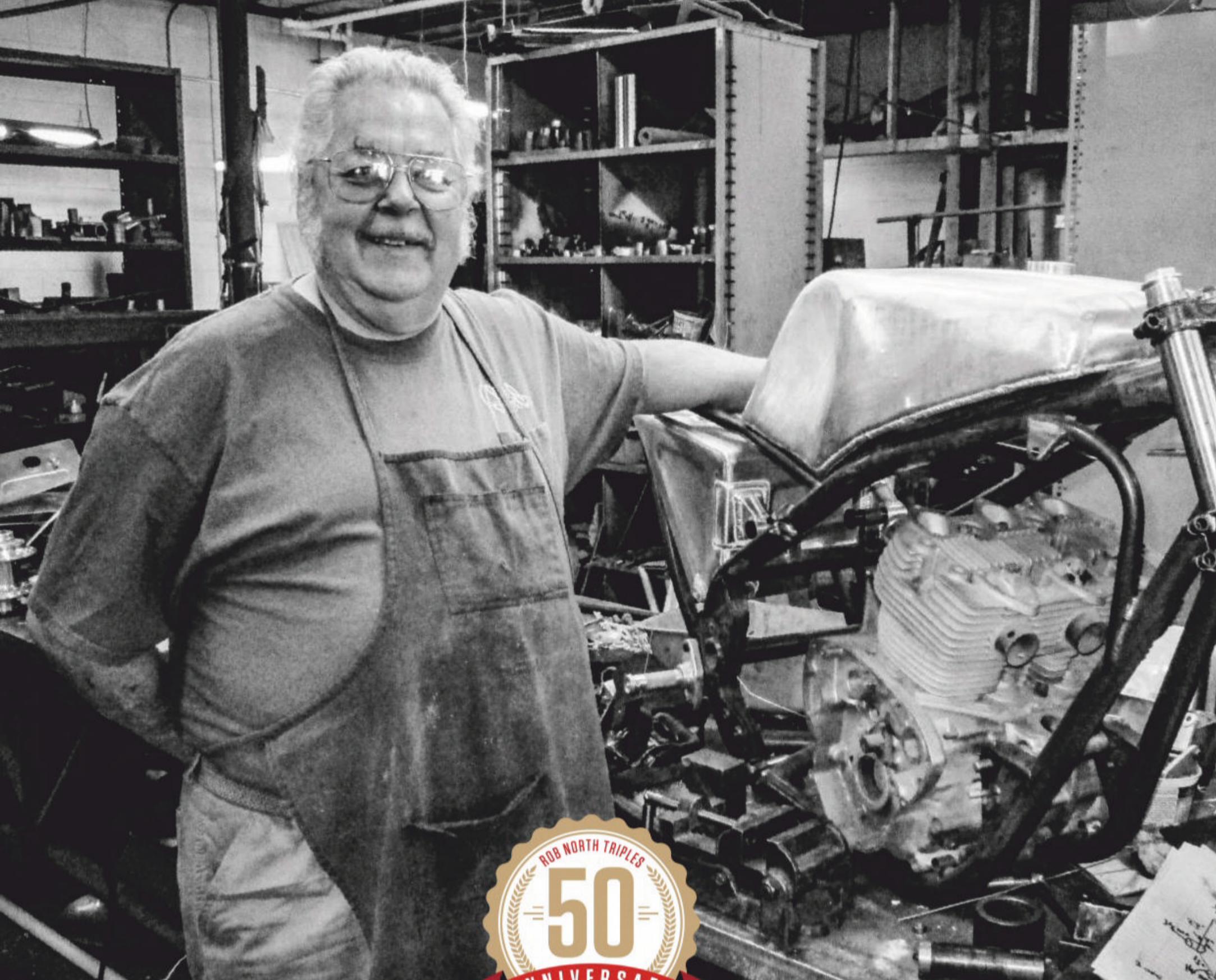




LEFT: 1970 bikes produced an 81bhp max at 8200rpm; 1971 version gave 84bhp at 8500rpm

RIGHT: Exhaust system, designed by Doug Hele, exited in a four-inch megaphone





ANGLE OF THE NORTH

Rob North reveals how he went from building a one-off triple frame for Percy Tait, to creating the entire fleet of rolling chassis for the BSA/Triumph racing team...

INTERVIEW: ALAN CATHCART PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAN CATHCART & BAUER ARCHIVE

Today, 79-year-old Rob North lives in Southern California, and still works every day in his RN Fabrications workshop in National City, just 15 miles from the Mexican border. There, he continues to produce examples of his iconic frame for the British triples – in racing guise for Classic F750 racing, and even with lights and a starter motor for street use.

At 17 years old, Rob began working for Doug Beasley, builder of special frames for 250cc Velocettes, and it was there that he met Triumph factory tester, the late Percy Tait, who was racing a Beasley Velo in the Lightweight class, for which Triumph didn't have a bike. The two became friends, and after North set up his own fabrication business in 1967 (as much to support his fledgling career as a sidecar racer as anything) he worked on stiffening up the Reynolds-framed 650 Triumph that Percy was racing. The bike had handling problems caused by the increased power from the factory-tuned engine, and Tait reckoned North's alterations improved the steering considerably. For the 1968 season, he developed a new frame for another Triumph Percy was to ride.

"In 1968 I was working for myself making frames for speedway bikes and road racing sidecars," says Rob. "I'd known Percy for ten years, and after helping with the 650 twin he wanted me to build a complete frame for a factory-tuned 500cc. I built two frames which were very similar to the later triples; they seemed to go OK in Percy's hands.

"I always focused on getting the steering head good and stiff to stop it flexing – that's why my frames were always

'I FOCUS ON GETTING THE STEERING HEAD GOOD AND STIFF'

so stable. So instead of the Featherbed arrangement where the tubes of the upper cradle sweep around the front downtubes and join the head stem at the bottom, with the front tubes attached to the top of the stem, I've always reversed the design, so on my frames the upper tubes are attached to the top of the head stem with the downtubes at the bottom and a bracing strut between the two – they were always really strong around the steering head.

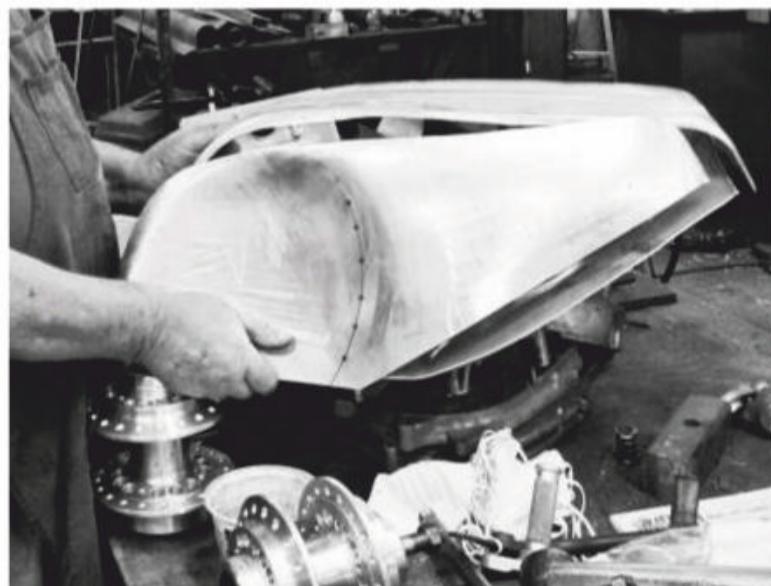
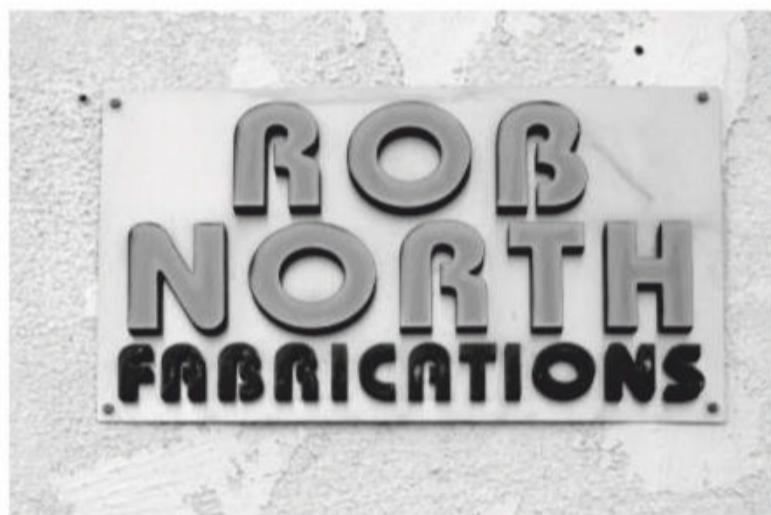
"Anyway, when the triple was launched, Percy asked me if I'd build a frame for it for him to race – nothing to do with the factory at that stage, just him and me. I obviously said yes, so he brought me a crankcase and a diamond

frame section that he'd found in the cellar underneath the Experimental Department at Triumph. I made up a jig for it, using this upper frame diamond which included the steering head. Percy said where he wanted the engine to be – we moved it one and a half inches further forward compared to the street bike, to put more weight

on the front wheel, and the same amount upwards for extra ground clearance with the wider engine. I made the jig with all the dimensions that he asked for using scrap angle iron, because it was supposed to be just a one-off exercise between me and Percy.

"It wasn't until some six months later that I discovered the diamond part of the frame that I'd been given out of the cellar was an experimental one they'd discarded because it was very steep – and that's why the first 1970 Highboy bikes had the forks set at 26°. It was too steep, so it fell into corners, although at Daytona it worked alright on the banking for everyone except Mike Hailwood, who

BELOW: Rob North is heading for his 80th birthday and still fabricating away in California. He still builds his famous frames, used as a basis for race bikes and road bikes (and a special 'tribute bike', bottom right). He also fabricates the distinctive tanks used for the Triumph/BSA triples.



complained it was unstable, and wanted a shorter swingarm. But those American guys were dirt trackers, so they were used to having the bikes moving around!

"The following year, when the Letterbox fairing version came out, I was able to push the steering head out another two degrees to 28°, as well as lower the whole front end two inches, which gave a smaller frontal aspect for better aerodynamics – that's why they were called Lowboys, and they were super-stable on the banking. The wheelbase was the same as the regular street bike, but the swingarm on the racer was an inch and a half longer than the regular bike to move the weight further forward.

"For Daytona in 1970 I started off making six of the first Highboy frames – half BSAs and half Triumphs, because that's what the Americans wanted. What happened was that after the first frame I did together with Percy, they did all the testing on it and then they turned around at the end of 1969 in November and said they wanted to go to Daytona the following March – but they needed six bikes altogether, so could I build six frames? And I did – I got them done in just a couple of months using 1½in T45 tubing for the main frame and 7/8in for the subframe carrying the seat.

"I had no machinery like a tube bender or suchlike – it was all done with a hacksaw, a file, and a bit of ingenuity. I'd fill the tubes with dry sand and plug the ends, then heat them up and bend them up over wooden patterns to hand-form the shapes – that's why each of the frames came out slightly different from the others. I'd then bronze-weld everything together in my jig, which located the steering head, swingarm pivot and engine mounts. I never did proper drawings of any of my frames – I just had the key

reference points written down while making the jig.

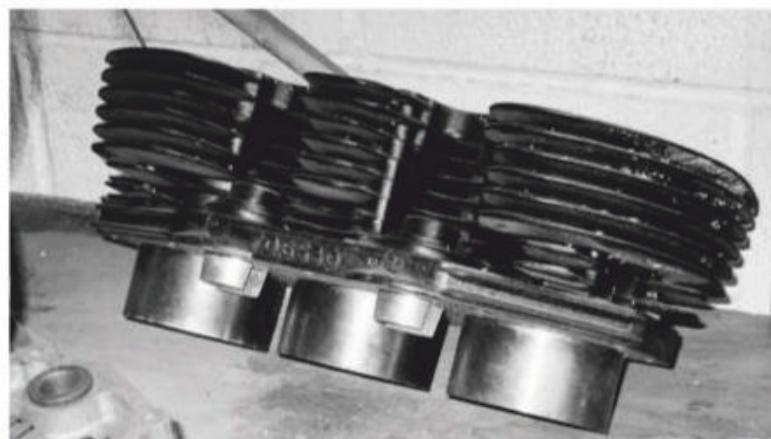
"However, they were leaving for Florida on the Wednesday – and on the Friday before that, Percy came to my shop, and he was all upset because the Americans wanted his bike, so he wasn't going. I called Doug Hele up and I said: 'Do you have enough parts for another bike?' He said: 'Well, yes we do'. So I set to on the Friday night, and I made the whole bike, including frame and swingarm, from nothing. On Sunday night at one o'clock I took it to the factory, and left it at the main gate. I said: 'Please can you get this to the racing shop first thing in the morning,' and by the Wednesday it was on a plane going over the Atlantic. Unfortunately, Percy fell off it in practice, so didn't race. But that same frame was the one that won the Bol d'Or 24 Hours race later that year with Paul Smart and Tom Dickie.

"Once they had cured some overheating problems they had at Daytona, the triples started winning races and breaking lap records everywhere, which was very satisfying. For 1971 the oil cooler was moved into the nose of the fairing – the Letterbox fairing that was done over at Umberslade Hall. I only built three or four of those at the time, early in 1971 – but, of course, ever since then that's the bike people want, especially after Dick Mann won the Daytona 200 on it.

"The Letterbox had the same wheelbase, but it was two inches lower on the steering head, and the forks were correspondingly shorter, too. The Fontana drum brake was good, but the forks would flex in the corners, so I made up some new, wider triple clamps out of sheet steel so they could get twin front discs in. Even being wider apart they didn't flex in the slightest, so Doug had me make up a set for each bike.



BELOW: The triple in the picture at top left is a special tribute bike, with the name of American factory Triumph/BSA riders on one side of the seat hump and the British factory riders on the other (see previous page). Percy Tait on a Rob North-framed triple at the Isle of Man TT (top right)





“By this time I’d moved the business to Short Street in Nuneaton, and I had eight people working for me, though we were doing exhaust systems for other bikes as well as the BSA/Triumphs. I was making a lot of replicas of the works bikes even back then, and got to the point where I talked to Doug about getting engines so I could build complete bikes, and they OK’d it.

“Then Bert Hopwood [Triumph’s CEO] wanted to buy all my stuff and set me up in a shop at the factory to do all the prototype work for them. But six months later they closed down, so I never got a penny out of it beyond the £145 for each race frame. And to make matters worse, just before they finally stopped racing, I delivered 12 brand new frames and triple clamps to Meriden, but they went into the cellar and I never found out what happened to them. They disappeared.

“The total number of BSA/Triumph Formula 750 frames we built over there in England before I left was 91 altogether. One had a Honda four in it [the Hadleigh Honda ridden so successfully in 1970s UK racing by Julian Soper]. One had a Suzuki 500 twin, but the rest of them were all Triumph and BSA triples. I sold the business and finally went to the Daytona 200 in 1973 to see it for myself – but then I just stayed on here in the USA afterwards. Don Vesco offered to set me up working for him in Southern California, so I headed out here to San Diego, and haven’t left since!

“The way the Rob North frame has become such a British motorcycle icon has definitely given me a lot of satisfaction, but the way certain people trademarked my

name without my permission, and then go ahead and advertise ‘Rob North this and Rob North that’ without any right to do so, that hurts a little. Still, I suppose on the other hand it gets my name up in plain view!

“I’ve been here in California since 1973, and the fact is that I’m the only one who continues to make the real Rob North triples – not replicas, but continuous production – and I still make the whole thing except for brake rotors, brake hydraulics and wheel rims. I build the whole bike with my own hands, I lay all the wheels up and I do all the painting. It’s all hand-built, and I have access to engines, so somebody can commission complete bikes from me, starting at \$40,000 and autographed by me! I even do a road Rob North Triumph with electric start.

“There’s a difference between the BSA and Triumph frames because the BSA cylinders are inclined forward by 15°, so the front engine mount is a lot shallower, but the rest of it is the same. The English frames were all made from Accles & Pollock T45 tubing, but the California-built ones made over here are in 4130 chrome-moly steel tube.

“I would like to add just one thing about all the guys that worked in the Triumph race shop. My name’s got attached to the bikes we built together, but it wasn’t just me – it was them, too. They’ve never had the recognition that I’ve had for these bikes – men like Fred Swift, Arthur Jakeman, Bill Fannon, Les Williams, Jack Shemans and, of course, Percy Tait, have been overlooked.

“I do realise that they helped me a tremendous amount, and I’m very grateful for it.”

ABOVE: Rob North, still at work in his workshop in National City, Southern California, in 2019

The JIGD



Mike Braid found the frame from this bike – Mike Hailwood's 1971 Daytona BSA – which had been used as a factory jig, and decided to use it to make his own factory race replica. Here's how...

WORDS BY ALAN CATHCART PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEL EDGE AND PHILLIP TOOTH

HAILWOOD FRAME COMEBACK

ECISION



Richard Peckett of P&M Motorcycles repaired the crash-damaged frame



'NOT THE ACTUAL HAILWOOD BIKE, BUT A MACHINE RECREATED IN THE SPIRIT OF IT FROM PARTS, MANY OF THEM EX-WORKS'

After Mike Hailwood's retirement from the 1971 Daytona 200, his BSA triple was returned to the UK to be converted to short-circuit specification and raced by Ray Pickrell in the inaugural Anglo-American Match Races held over the Easter weekend of the same year.

Pickrell won three of the six races held, but crashed in the final one at Oulton Park on Easter Monday, on the approach to Knicker Brook, damaging the frame sufficiently for it to need replacement. The bent-up original was consigned to a role as a jig at the Triumph factory, where it was used to aid manufacture of the two types of aluminium fuel tanks built for Rob North's new design of Lowboy frames.

After the factory closed, this tank jig was among many of the Experimental Department's bits of kit which ended up in race-fitter Les Williams' Triumph spares business.

Mike Braid, who owns the 'Hailwood BSA' takes up the story: "In 1987-88 I was riding a couple of F750 Rob North triples in classic events, and while I was at Les Williams's getting parts, I glimpsed a chassis behind the counter. It was the Lowboy frame that had been turned into a tank-making jig. Les agreed to sell and I started collecting bits and pieces to build it as a proper factory-style bike, in the guise of a works 1971 Daytona machine.

"I bought a lot of stuff from Les, including wheels and various other factory parts. I took all this to Richard Peckett of P&M Motorcycles, who is generally accepted as being the world's number one preparer of BSA/Triumph triples for classic racing, and asked him to repair the chassis.

"It wasn't in a very good state, but Richard's rebuilding crashed triples all the time, and his British TT F1 title-winning P&M frames speak for themselves. So I asked him to cut out all the bad stuff and rebuild it as it would've been in 1971, which he did, finishing it off in 1990."

"Without ever claiming to be the actual Hailwood bike, but a machine recreated in the spirit of it from a collection of parts, many of them ex-works, we built the bike as close as possible to 1971 Daytona specs.

"It has a factory squish cylinder head, with the re-angled centre spark plug. It's got squish pistons. It's got the original factory ignition system with the quill drive for the points and the Zener diodes. And it's got the original Quaife five-speed gearbox as used in the factory bikes. The motorcycle has a lot of original factory parts on it. The tank was built by Don Woodward, who made the original fuel tanks using that very frame, and the bodywork is an original Screens and Plastics Rob North fairing.

"Without going overboard, I've tried to make it as close as possible to what that bike would've been in 1971, and Richard has done a really fine job in recreating it. It first ran at the 1990 Brands Super Prix, and I bring it out from time to time at major classic events, including Isle of Man TT Parades. There are only so many components in a motorbike, and if they're reasonably close to the original then it's going to be pretty much the same bike. The engine is as close as it's ever going to get to the bike that was wheeled out in 1971, in an original frame that nobody disputes was raced by Mike Hailwood."

HAILWOOD FRAME COMEBACK



The bike has many original works parts, including a squish cylinder head and pistons. The bodywork is an original Screens and Plastics Rob North fairing

Mike on his bike with the 1971 BSA team at Daytona: Don Emde, Mike Hailwood, Dick Mann, Dave Aldana and Jim Rice





CB's Gez riding Graham's bike this winter. The conditions may have been far from ideal, but despite the cold he came back with a warm glow of appreciation



Graham Holloway built his bike in the 1980s using a replica Rob North frame and a T150V engine

RIDING YESTERDAY'S LEGEND TODAY

The Rob North racing triples are the stuff of legend. What if you had one on the road though? Graham Holloway has.

WORDS: GEZ KANE PHOTOGRAPHY: STUART COLLINS

The almost mythical status enjoyed by Rob North Triumph and BSA triples is astonishing – even now, 50 years since Doug Hele employed the independent frame builder to help turn a production road bike into a racing legend. The results of his endeavours, together with a lot of hard graft and clever thinking from Hele's newly-formed racing department at Meriden, created a machine that was so much more than merely the sum of its parts.

As we've detailed in the previous pages, the factory campaigned the works triples for only two glorious seasons – as the dust settled on an amazing year for the Triumph and BSA works team in 1971, the factory team was wound up. Although dealer teams and private entrants would keep the triples competitive for a few more years, for the factory it was over. But the legend certainly wasn't...

The exploits of the works team made a lasting impression on a lot of race fans on both sides of the Atlantic – and in the UK one of them was Nottinghamshire man Graham Holloway. Graham was one of thousands of race fans captivated by the sight and sound of the works triples beating the best in the world back in the early '70s. At the time, he couldn't afford a road-going Trident, let alone one of the fabulous Rob North creations. But the impression the works racers made on him just wouldn't go away. He bought his first triple, a Triumph T150V, in 1979 – and he still owns it today. But he also owns a Rob North-framed Triumph triple too. It's not a racer, but back in the early '80s when he built it, it was his ultimate road bike.

"I was mad for triples back then – still am, I suppose," Graham smiles. "One of my mates had a T150V like mine, but he crashed his in France and totalled the back end. ▶



ABOVE: The bike on its bench in Graham's workshop. It's been through a few incarnations since he built it, including a period as a 1000cc big-bore

When he got it back, he got made redundant and needed some cash, so I bought the crashed bike from him. I knew just what I was going to do with it..."

That was around 1982. Back in 1970/71, Rob North's contract to build the racing frames barred him from making replicas of the works frames for anyone else. But when the team folded he was free to make what he wanted – and he did, emigrating to America and producing numerous frames before selling the UK rights to manufacture Rob North frames to Norman Miles of Miles Engineering in Teddington. Graham's dream was about to become a reality.

"The first time I saw a Rob North road bike was at the Road Racing and Sporting Show at the New Horticultural Halls in London. That would be in the mid-'70s. It looked amazing and I fancied one from then on," he recalls. "The only problem was affording one. I had a good engine and front end from my mate's crashed bike, so I sold a Suzuki RL250 trials bike I had at the time and ordered a frame and oil tank from Norman Miles. I was just going to buy the frame at first, but Norman made me order the oil tank at the same time. He said I'd never work out how to get it into the frame if he didn't show me, and he brought the frame and oil tank up to Mallory Park when he was racing there to save me going all the way down to his workshop."

The £495 price tag for the Miles frame put a dent in Graham's finances and the build of the bike was a stop/go affair spread over a couple of years. "When I first built the bike, it had CMA cast-alloy wheels because that's what my mate had on the donor bike," Graham says. "The front wheel was fine, so I saved a few quid by just buying a matching rear. The paintwork was all black and I had a big, five-gallon tank on it. Norman delivered the fairing and seat for it to Mallory Park again when I could afford it. I left the engine standard as it went well enough, and

fabricated the exhaust system myself out of a Dunstall system intended for a Suzuki GS1000."

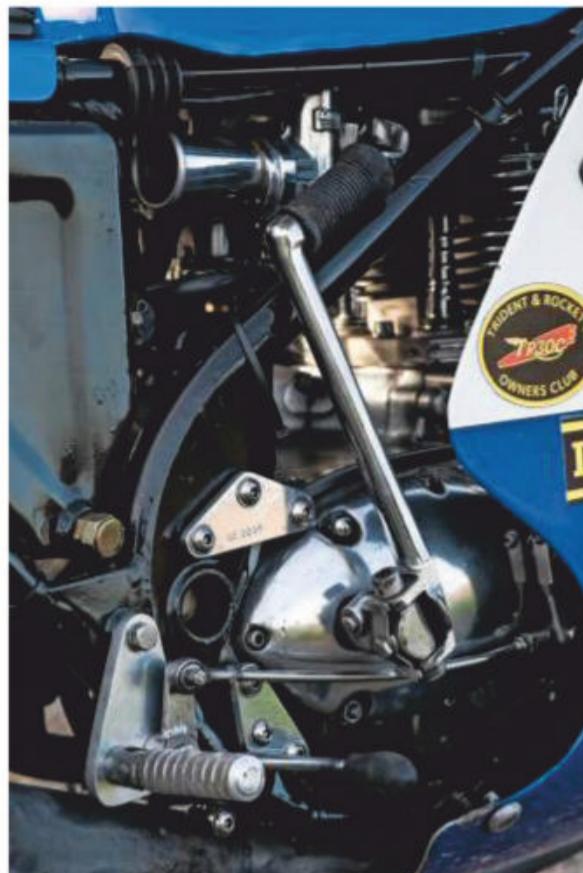
By 1985, the bike was on the road and ready for its first big trip. "I rode it to the TT that year," Graham remembers. "Another time, I rode it to Assen for the Dutch TT. I had a tent strapped on the back. And I travelled all over the UK following road racing. I loved it from the off."

Feeling the love for the bike hasn't stopped it going through a few different incarnations over the years, though. "I rebuilt the top end with a 1000cc big-bore kit," Graham reveals. "But it just wouldn't stay together. I got fed up with stripping it down all the time and went back to the 750 barrels. I rebuilt it again about 10 years ago, to the specification it's in now – and I'm pretty pleased with it. I think this is how it'll stay."

It certainly looks good to me and I'm intrigued to find out what goes into making a Rob North Trident look as

RIGHT: Graham on the bike at Cadwell Park in 1992, when it was fitted with cast CMA wheels. He's ridden it all over the place over the years





ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Rear brake has slightly less bite than the excellent front twin discs. Forgetting to fold up the footrest before attempting to kick the bike into life will result in expletives being uttered. The whole chassis, including the box-section swingarm and twin shocks, is super-stable, instilling huge confidence in the rider

'THE FRAME IS THE SAME AS THE RACE VERSION EXCEPT FOR A BRACKET FOR A SIDESTAND AND A BOX-SECTION SWINGARM'

good as this one. Graham's happy to talk me through the spec over a brew in his spacious workshop. "The frame is exactly the same as the racing version except for the addition of a bracket to take a side stand," he explains. "Oh, and the swinging arm is box section on the Miles frames – the works racers had oval-section swinging arm tubes. There's no difference to the geometry though – or the quality."

The forks are still the stock items from that crashed donor bike, though the bike has been through a few rear shocks. "I'm running a pair of Café Racer Suspension (caferacersuspension.com) shocks on it," Graham continues, "they work really well."

The engine is in its third incarnation. "I wanted a bit more performance but, after all the trouble I'd had with the 1000cc big-bore, I went for an 850 kit from triple specialist Neil Beadling," says Graham. "He's got a great reputation in triples circles and LP Williams (triumph-spares.co.uk) markets his kits. I've had no bother with it. I've got 51B cams in it and it pulls like a train. I replaced the old home-brewed exhaust system with a new North replica-type from current owner of the Rob North name, Les Whiston (robnorthtriples.com)"

With the bike in bits, Graham took the opportunity to replace the cast CMA wheels with spoked wheels. "It looks more like the real thing," he grins. And he replaced the old Boyer

electronic ignition with a state-of-the-art Tri-Spark kit. "The rest of it is pretty much as it was when I first built it," Graham continues. "The loom is the original, the carbs and oil cooler are standard T150V and even the headlight is a survivor of the first build – I got it out of an old Austin Allegro in a local scrapyard. I bet it's the only bit of the car that's still around! I bought a smaller tank from Les

Whiston, too – and I've recently fitted a Koso (koso.com) electronic combined rev counter/speedometer."

Everything comes together so well on the bike – it doesn't look like a special. After all, the frame is an exact copy of the one the factory race team used 50 years ago. It's certainly a stunning looking machine.

I was keen to find out what went into making the bike look as good as it does, but I'm even more enthusiastic about finding out how it performs on the road. And, despite it being a clear but cold winter's day, Graham's happy to let me find out – despite the slightly damp roads. "It's a bike. It's meant to be used," he laughs as he warms up the engine before I head off to enjoy the Rob North experience.

The first thing I notice is how physically small the bike is. With the big, three-cylinder lump hidden behind the fairing panels, it could be a 250. But once the big-bore engine strikes up, bellowing through the marginally-silenced three-into-one exhaust, there's

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE/TRANSMISSION

Type	Air-cooled, ohv, transverse, in-line triple
Dimensions	71.5 x 70mm
Capacity	843cc
Output	70bhp at 7250rpm (est)
Compression ratio	9.5:1
Carburation	3 x 27mm Amal Concentrics
Clutch	Wet multiplate
Gearbox	Five speed

CHASSIS

Frame	Tubular double cradle type
Front suspension	Triumph telescopic forks
Rear suspension	Twinshock
Brakes front/rear	Twin 10in (254mm) AP Lockheed discs/single 10in (254mm) Lockheed disc
Wheels	Spoked

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	57in (1448mm)
Weight	401lb (182kg, estimate)

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	135mph (estimate)
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no doubt that this is a proper, big-bore bruiser. Graham's not as tall as me, but the riding position is surprisingly accommodating. The rear brake pedal and gearshift are tilted down at the perfect angle for my size nines and the even positioning of the rearsets doesn't cause my dilapidated knees any undue stress.

There's no doubting that the riding position – and the severely limited steering lock – are aimed at high-speed work. Turning the bike round requires the width of a tennis court if I want to avoid frustrating paddling back and forth,

lock to lock. The bars are low and getting stuck in traffic is no fun. And, if you stall the engine (as I did once when turning the bike round) the routine for starting – find neutral, fold up footrest, try to get right foot up onto the (long) kickstart lever while stretching down to the low clip-ons, before swinging down firmly enough to light up the engine – is one you won't want to have to repeat too often. There's no getting away from the fact that this is a racer on the road rather than just a look-alike. The Rob North Trident certainly demands that you suffer for your art.

But if that art is going fast and smoothly on an open road, this is one of the finest experiences on two wheels. Even taking it steady on the greasy roads, the chassis feels reassuringly stable and rock steady. It holds a line almost intuitively and the low, light and super-stiff frame makes changing direction just as easy. It makes me realise just how advanced this frame must have been 50 years ago. The faster I go, the better it feels.

The Rob North frame may define the bike, but the superb engine complements it perfectly. The 850cc unit pulls from nothing and revs quickly and cleanly. The ratios in the five-speed 'box are perfectly matched to the engine's power delivery, with a usefully low first gear and reasonably closely-spaced ratios thereafter. It makes riding fast and smoothly easy – and fun. Lovely.

As for the brakes, the twin front discs on Graham's bike are some of the best I've ever sampled on a classic bike. He obviously has them bled to perfection and assembled meticulously. They've got real bite, but plenty of feel too, while the rear packs slightly less venom – ideal for throwing into the mix when a real panic braking situation arises.

On a day like this and road surfaces like this, Graham's Rob North Trident is a bike I really shouldn't be enjoying. But I am. It's too fast, too powerful too single-mindedly set up for the pursuit of out-and-out speed to be fun on damp back roads. Somehow, though, it pulls off the trick of fixing a smile underneath my dripping nose.

A bike you've owned for more than 35 years must be something special and I wonder what the enduring appeal of his Rob North Trident is to Graham. "When I walk into the workshop and see it there on the bench, it just brings a smile to my face," he explains. "I don't ride it on the road so much now – I use it more for track events like the Beezumph and Spa Bikers' Classics. I got to ride on it on the parade lap at the Classic TT last year and that was really special. When you ride it fast, it really comes into its own. But it really is a great-looking bike and I just love having it in the workshop."

I would, too. And despite Graham reckoning that riding it on the road is getting hard work sometimes ("it didn't seem that bad 40 years ago") I don't think it'll be going anywhere soon. Oh, except the Isle of Man, Cadwell Park, Spa Francorchamps and... 

Go to Beezumph.com for details of this year's Trident & Rocket Three Owners Club track day and rally

THE FRAME GAME

If Graham's bike has inspired you to build your own Rob North special, good news. Les Whiston's Rob North Triples outfit can supply just about anything you'll need to make your dream project a reality. Les is the official rights owner of the Rob North name, having bought them from John Sims, of Trident Engineering – who had bought them from Norman Miles back in 2005 – in 2008. Norman took over the jigs and rights from Stan Shenton, who bought them from Rob North when he emigrated in 1973. Les can provide everything from a replica frame (or full rolling chassis) to brand new crankcases, cranks and rods and other triples specialists like Neil Beadling can help you out, too.

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Not such a DAFT IDEA

Riding a 1932 Douglas on a 1600-mile round trip to a remote Scottish island wasn't the most sensible notion Jason Hearn had ever had – but moments like this made it all worthwhile. And there were plenty more where that came from...

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON HEARN



L

ast summer I found myself riding from Cornwall to Tiree, in Scotland – a distance of about 800 miles – and back again. Over the years, I've often ridden that kind of distance in 24 hours, but this trip was a bit more taxing due to the bike – a 1932 Douglas T6 'Airedale'.

I had plotted a route that avoided dual carriageways and major towns as much as possible. And as it's not a particularly quick bike, with the hand gearchange providing an additional challenge in continuous stop/start traffic, I gave myself around 15 days of which three were spent on Tiree, the most westerly island in the Inner Hebrides.

Of course, such distances are child's play to the likes of Bob Fulton Jnr, who circumnavigated the world in 1932 on a very similar Douglas. Unlike Bob, who announced his world trip in front of the proprietor of Douglas Motors, who promptly gave Bob a bike to do it all on, I had to supply my own motorcycle.

The T6 in question is jointly owned by my uncle, Pat Gormley, and myself. He gets to use it as regular transport throughout the year, while I get to use it for one month of the year – after which Pat has 11 months to fettle it back to good health.



Jason set off with hope in his heart and fully loaded with pure enthusiasm. What could possibly go wrong?

So why was I doing it, and at that particular time? Well, apart from timing it so I could be at the Tiree Festival, the island is also in one of the most remote parts of the UK, so it would scratch an adventurous itch. I've often wondered about my own round-the-world trip, having read quite a few books on the subject. *Jupiter's Travels* by Ted Simon was the first of many, while *Mondo Enduro* by Austin Vince et al was also another entertaining read. A couple of years ago

I had the opportunity of joining Austin Vince for a Mini Mondo week in the Pyrenees. Off-road all the way, it was huge fun. And on a visit to India, I also rented one of the new Royal Enfield Himalayan models. Boy, was I hooked – and not only that, I had found my perfect bike for my own potential round-the-world venture.

Then one day, *One Man Caravan* was waved under my nose. Read it if you can get your hands on a copy. It's the story of Bob Fulton's journey around the world on the Douglas in 1932. Thus the idea was planted into my head that, perhaps, I could take the T6 in place of the Himalayan; 'Secondhand Caravan', if you like.

It was a completely daft idea, of course. The bike is older than myself – I'm half a century old as it is, and I have a fairly



damned good idea as to which one will fall apart first. And that was the beauty of it – the whole idea was so ludicrous that it had to be done. Such a choice would force me into using more local roads and potentially allow me to see much more along the way.

My journey to Tiree would really be the first step to my round-the-world trip: getting to know and live with the bike over the space of a few weeks, riding it a considerable distance, finding camping spots, blagging floor space, meeting old friends, finding new ones... and just basically living life to the full.

The first leg from Pat's place in Liskeard was done without any serious luggage. Up over Dartmoor was the way to go – going fast was not an option, in fact as I was almost at walking speed up some of the hills, I decided to stop and take in the views. The sheep just grazed and gazed nonchalantly. The brakes (or rather the slow retardation device affixed to the front wheel) nearly caught me out on a sharp, steep 90° left-hander that had roadworks and a big, red stop light around the corner. Only by adding the grip of my Altberg boots, which effectively tripled the amount of braking power available to me, did I avoid becoming an ornament on an oncoming 4x4.

A few days of preparation ensued at my place in Blandford Forum, including buying a GPS speedometer so I had an idea of the mileage covered (and the petrol in the tank). Packing things precariously on the back, I made the next leg, thankfully short, to my sister's place, and the home of the Love Beer brewery in Abingdon that had a beer festival on. I still hadn't got the technique of starting the bike when cold; it had been quite comforting to watch Pat show how easily it can be done, but it certainly wasn't being easy for me! I also needed to reorganise my precariously teetering luggage before it fell off the bike completely.

Thankfully hangover free, day three had been planned as the first serious riding day. Navigation was easy, as the route I'd chosen was very familiar from years of attending the National Rally and living in the Midlands. In order to make things more interesting, I had been fed with little titbits of misinformation, the first being that it was a three-gallon tank on the T6 and I should be starting to look for petrol stations around the 100-mile mark. Hence, at 91 miles,

as the bike spluttered through fuel starvation, I had to U-turn back to the petrol station I'd just missed. I stopped to offer help to a Ducati rider at the roadside who I had already passed three times, but he was just stiff and sore from being folded up on his bike! The rest of the day was a pleasant ride, apart from the concrete jungle that sprawls between Liverpool and Leeds. That night I stayed with friends Orb and Alex in Rochdale, with lamb and wine on the menu.

Whilst in Rochdale, one of Orb's mates came round waving wildly his latest find at Aldi – a waterproof bag. I had to have one, so day four started with a bit of shopping. Suitably equipped with a bright yellow bag and a small camping chair, I repacked and toolled up the long hill to the Pennines. It was a glorious ride. Then it was on to the Lake District – another glorious ride with the bike handling like a dream. I stopped off for a pub lunch just before Kirkstone Pass.

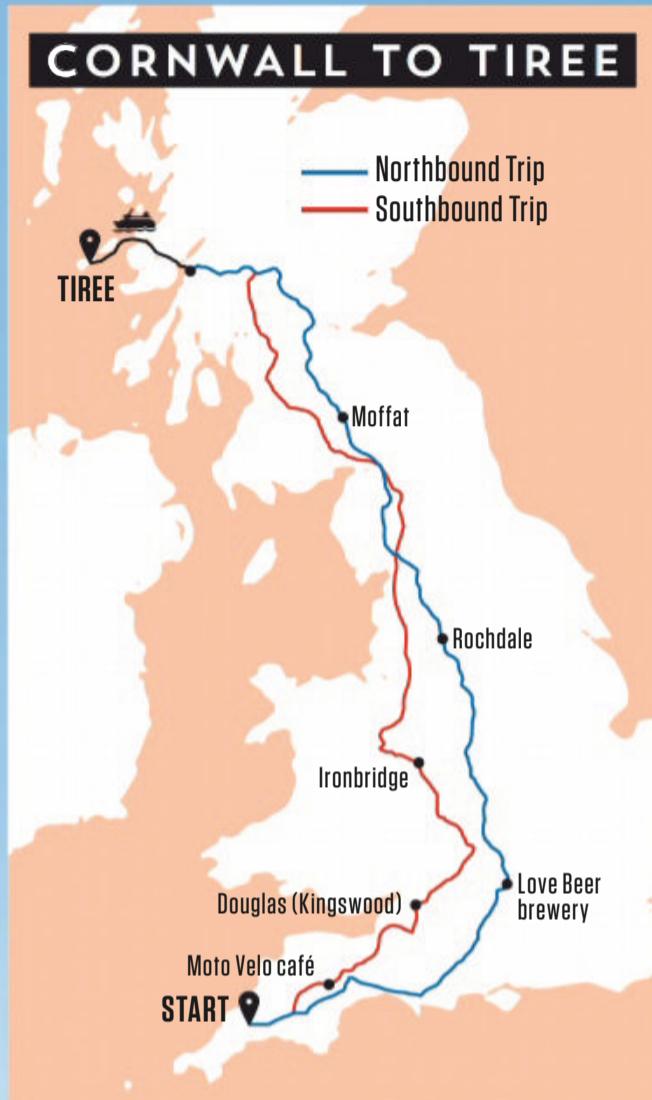
Just after lunch, I found myself wondering how the hell modern cars could actually hold up a fully-loaded T6 going up one of the highest passes in England. Overtaking is a tricky business, but bailing an overtake is even hairier, as I soon found out – but I eventually managed it on the downhill stretch. Traffic aside, the bike waffled along nicely on narrow lanes up to and beyond Carlisle. An old, straight and, above all, empty A-road led me to Moffat and my first overnight campsite.

The Duggie was an instant hit, but it didn't get me any discount at the Camping and Caravanning Club site. Disgusted, the bike marked its spot on the pavement outside reception. The other 'old' bikes that I was pointed towards turned out to be EFI-engined Enfields!

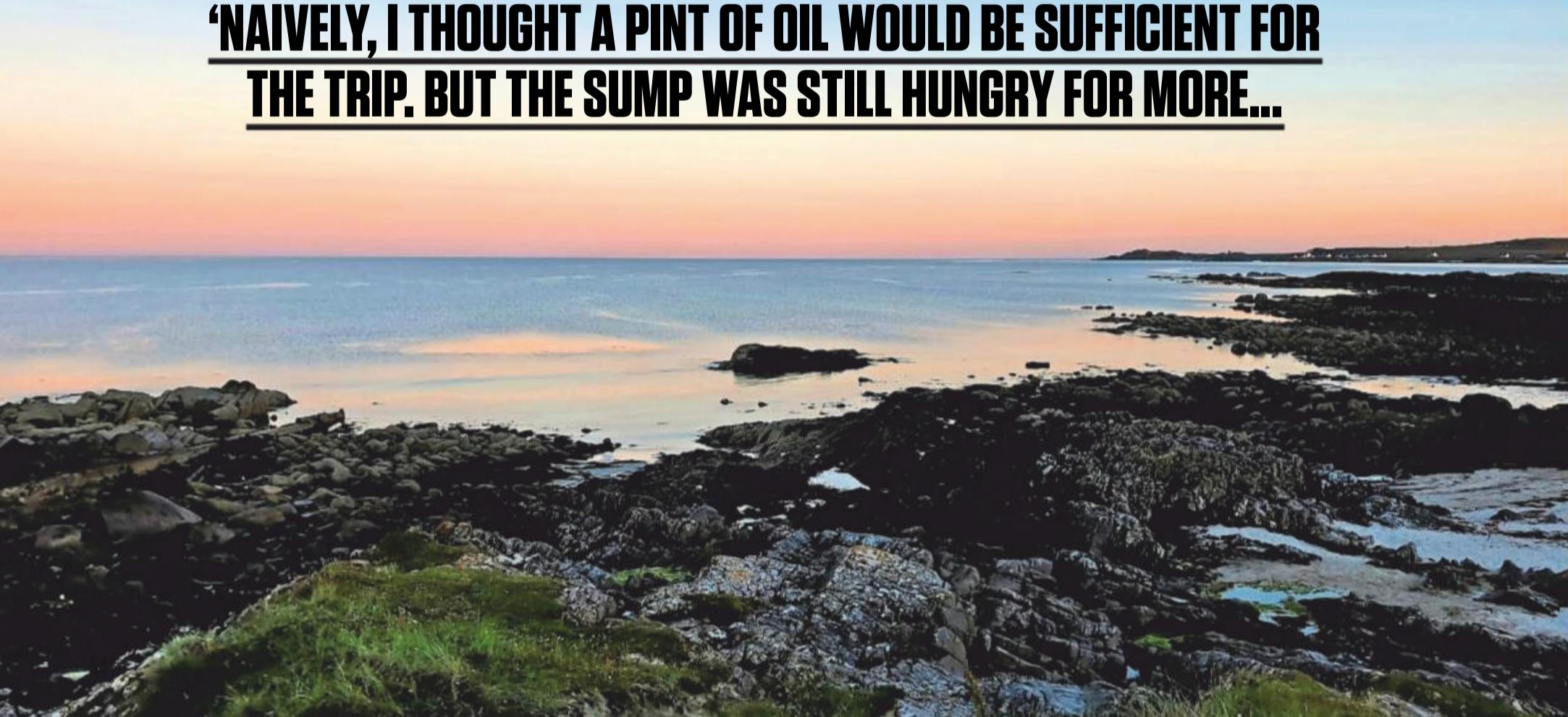
On leaving Moffat, I gave the bike the remainder of the pint of oil that I was given. Naively, I thought that this would

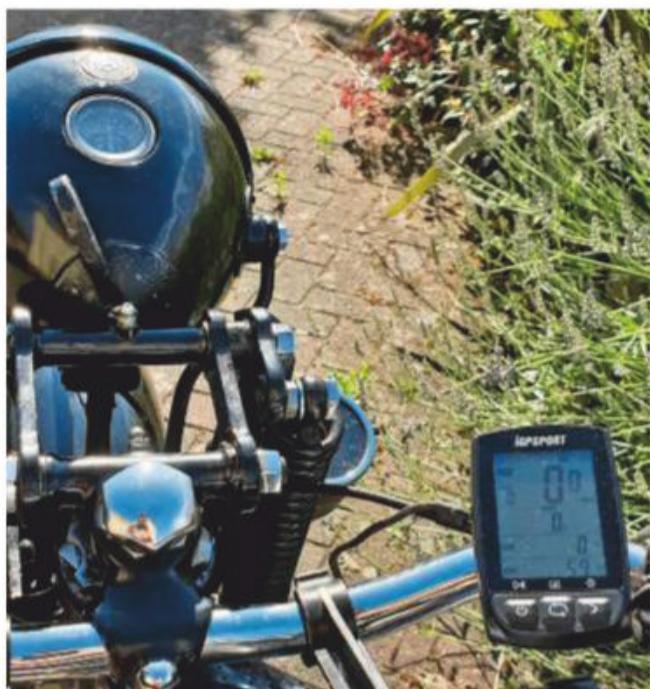
be sufficient for the trip. Apparently not. The sump was still hungry for more... a pint, as it turned out, was probably good for 200 miles. I had ridden about 500 by that stage!

I woke the next day to the sound of rain. I knew it was going to be a wet one and I half-anticipated waiting the day out, but... sod it, rain will stop at the skin. (Wet) suited and booted, I rode up through some of Scotland's finest roads and, apart from a brief negotiation ➤

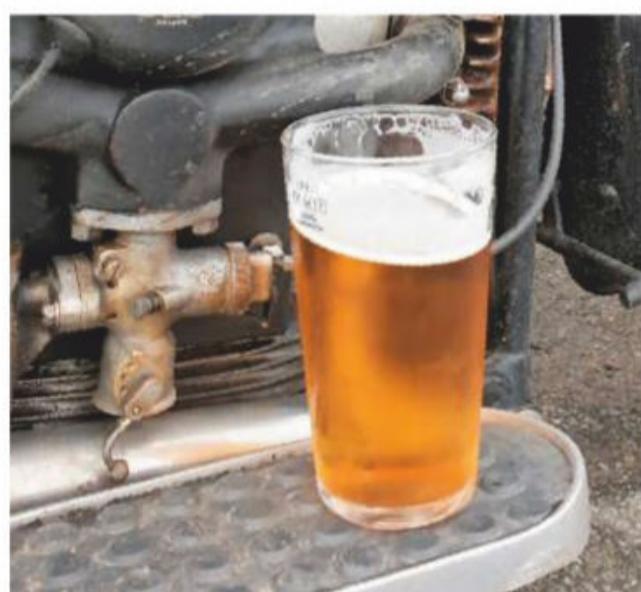


'NAIVELY, I THOUGHT A PINT OF OIL WOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE TRIP. BUT THE SUMP WAS STILL HUNGRY FOR MORE...'





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GPS unit was fitted as a speedometer and 'fuel gauge'. All of Jason's carefully lashed-on luggage stayed on the bike. These young admirers could be the classic riders of tomorrow. A stop off at Ironbridge on the way home. The bike returns to its birthplace – the old Douglas factory at Kingswood, Bristol. The bike guzzled pints of oil; Jason's pints were of a different liquid. The oil-checking ritual being carried out in front of an audience. The Douglas near Oban, the Scottish port from which the Tiree ferry sails





of the Glasgow-Edinburgh barrier, had a very enjoyable ride. I learned to veer to the shallowest parts of the puddles on the roads – and to shut off the throttle when going through them, as the air intake points down and is about six inches from the road surface. (I might try to mod that somehow as there were a couple of times the engine coughed as it inhaled the wet stuff.)

A relaxing day in Oban followed. I spent the morning in a motor factor's that had managed to get hold of five litres of straight 40 oil. I put the fuel reserves in the tank and filled my three fuel bottles (and the sump) with oil. Tickets to Tiree had sold out five months ago but I was reliably informed by CalMac ferries that I could wing it on the day (I did). Grey and misty, there wasn't a great deal to see until Tiree, when dolphins welcomed the boat on entry to the port. I rode to the festival site. I had made it!

I was greeted with: "Ooh my dad had a Douglas... how old is that?" Needless to say, the T6 made a popular sideshow. It was also so great hooning round the local lanes that, after the festival had finished, I ran out of petrol on the way back to the ferry. And I had no spare fuel – just spare oil! There is only one petrol station on the island – at the ferry port. I switched on to reserve... nothing. Reserve, as it turns out, works as well as the front brake. With a couple of tilting-the-bike antics, riding up a bank, and then both, I managed to get enough juice into the carb to make it to the port. A long line of people trying to get off the rock indicated that I wasn't going to wing this one with CalMac, but I did finally get off in the evening. No dolphins this time, but a glorious sun-filled day.

The ride back featured more of the same glorious, empty roads. After the longest ride of the trip, I had a campsite stop-off south of Carlisle – although there's no hurrying this bike, so even after seven

LEFT TO RIGHT: Fellow Douglas rider Mark Jones, who directed Jason to an overnight stopover. Jason does selfie. Moto Velo offers coffee, accommodation and bikes for sale

hours in the saddle I didn't feel tired. Riding through Wigan and the surrounding area was painful, and the bike was getting hot and bothered after a couple of hours of it, but the second return stopover was outside a pub that fellow Douglas rider Mark Jones took me to, just outside of Shrewsbury. With two Duggies zipping along the lanes, it constituted an official ride out. Hope to see Mark on one of the annual meets.

Riding and living with the bike was really getting to be second nature now. The anticipation of 'will the bike do the journey?' or even 'can I do the journey on this bike?' had fallen away and another glorious day in the saddle followed. Time for some sightseeing and popping in to see friends. Breakfast at Ironbridge, a tea stop at Ian's place in Northleach (he has a hard job selling bikes that he buys, as he doesn't advertise them – and as he runs a bike business, some might see that as a weakness). A stopover at what remains of the Douglas factory site in Kingswood, Bristol followed and then onwards to an overnight stop at my friend Jack's.

The last day was wet. Hissing it down. But the bike started first time and we splashed away. The weather cleared up until Taunton and then hissed it again. I enjoyed a coffee stop at Moto Velo in Crediton – highly recommended but dangerous for the wallet as they have interesting bikes in the room. Back into the wet gear and splashed down to Tavistock and back to Liskeard for a very welcome pint.

So what next? Well, by any account this was a successful ride in so many ways. I can't believe the calmness of the bike. You can be in a rush, but the bike will never be. It will go at its own pace. It did 1500 miles with no issues other than a clutch adjustment. It certainly felt very strange not to be riding it the next day. The bike could go on further. I could have, too. And one day, I will... 

'IT WAS SO GREAT HOONING ROUND THE LANES OF TIREE THAT I RAN OUT OF PETROL ON THE WAY BACK TO THE FERRY'



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ClassicBike
COLLECTOR

DAVE LEWIS

Dave's collecting habits are multi-dimensional. We dealt with his passion for a particular British two-stroke before, but he's also got a thing about classic trials irons...

WORDS: GARY PINCHIN PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY MARGERUM



**'WHEN I WAS MUCH
YOUNGER, I USED TO PLAY
FOOTBALL, BUT IN THE
DISTANCE I COULD HEAR
TRIALS BIKES'**

LEFT: Dave Lewis kicked footie into touch and heeded the call of the trials bikes...

Remember Dave Lewis, who we featured in 'Collector' in the June 2019 Issue? He had shed after shed (and his house) full of BSA Bantams with virtually every model year represented, not to mention the kind of spares stash the BSA factory would have been proud of.

Well, he also has a bunch of classic trials bikes dotted around the homestead, so we've been back to photograph them and talk to Dave about his second 'collection'.

It transpires that Dave's interest in trials actually predates his Bantam obsession. "I've always had a thing about trials bikes," he reveals. "When I was much younger, I used to play football, but in the distance I could hear trials bikes and thought: 'Why am I playing football when I could be riding a trials bike?' So in 1972 I bought a 250 Bultaco, my first proper trials bike, off a guy I worked with at Rolls-Royce. Shortly after, I changed that for a 1976 325cc Bultaco.

"A few years later, while I was still trialling, I was out and about, wearing a Bultaco shirt, and this woman stopped me. She wanted to know if I had a Bultaco and knew anything about them, so I explained I was competing with one. She

said her husband had a bike that might interest me and invited me to pop over at the weekend. When I arrived at the house, there was a truck with David Coulthard's F1 car in it. Turned out her husband worked in F1 and was taking the car on a promo tour. Anyway, he happened to own an F3 car, a sports car... and a Bultaco which needed restoring. It was a 1980 model, but he had no time to work on it so he asked me if I'd restore it for him! I rebuilt it from the ground up. That was start of me restoring trials bikes."

In the meantime, Dave got into his Bantam restorations but the trials interest was always there and returned with a vengeance when he got divorced in 2008 – for a second time.

"I went to Stafford and a mate had a 2005 Montesa 4RT for sale there. He didn't sell it at the show, so I bought it. I did five trials in eight days and ended up riding for a year. After one event at Hawkstone I thought: 'Either I'm going to get hurt doing this or the bike is,' so I sold it."

That was 2011, but far from being done with trials, the experience only fuelled Dave's passion for the sport. It's just that, rather than riding them, he decided to channel his enthusiasm into restoring older bikes. ◉

I PAID £275. SOUNDS A GOOD BUY - BUT IT ARRIVED ON A PALLET IN BITS'

RIGHT: Dave bought his Yamaha TY175 for silly money but had to spend an equally mad amount of time rebuilding it from the ground up



"I'd always wanted a Yamaha trials bike so that's why I bought the TY. It's kind of got a bit out of control ever since..."

1976 YAMAHA TY175

The first Yamaha to appear in a European championship trial was a DT250 trailie, in 1968. Two years later French trials rider Christian Rayer suggested to Sonauto Yamaha France boss Jean Claude Olivier that it might be a good idea for Yamaha to create a proper trials bike, based on the DT250. A prototype was completed for Rayer by the end of 1971 – but with a 360 engine.

Yamaha then hired Brit Mick Andrews, the 1971 and 1972 European Trials Champion riding a Spanish-built Ossa, to help develop the prototype, first with a 360cc engine and then a 250. Andrews finished runner-up in the championship on the prototype Yamaha and in the summer of 1973 the Japanese company launched the TY250 (T for Trials, Y for Yamaha) production trials bike.

The following year there was a full range of TYS, with the addition of a Japan-only TY50, plus a TY80, TY125 and TY175. Dave's TY is a 1976 175.

"I bought it off eBay from a guy in Bishop's Castle, which is near to me. I paid £275, which sounds a good buy – but it arrived on a pallet in bits, so it was a ground-up restoration.

I got forks and yokes from the States. There's no rust on American stuff and it was as cheap to import as it would have been to get the original parts rechromed.

"The rest of it I rebuilt myself. The stainless rims are original, but I've respoked them. I sprayed the original tank and side panels. It's got a new, original front pipe and a WES rear pipe. The seat is new old stock. It had chrome bars as standard, but I prefer the Renthal. The pegs are from Sammy Miller, the front mudguard is genuine new old stock and the shocks are Gas."

1983 MONTESA COTA 242

This is one of the last of this Spanish firm's last twinshock models – and Dave's Cota was another eBay find. "I do spend a fair bit of time on there," he says. "I'd been to a jumble at Ross-on-Wye, saw a tidy 242 there and realised I should have bought it. It was similar money to what I paid for this.

"Anyway, then I was consoling myself on eBay and saw this one come up for sale. I phoned the guy straight away and he told me the only reason he was selling was that he had a bad neck and couldn't ride any more. I said I'd be over. He worked nights and finished at 5am, so I travelled overnight to be there waiting for him when he got home. We took the bike to a nearby industrial estate, fired it up and it sounded



fine. The shocks were knackered, but otherwise it was sound.

"It was up for £750, but he said to give him £650 and I could have it. What a deal! It was all white when I bought it, but I've tidied it up a bit and now have two different tank options – plus it's got different forks and mudguards and a new sidestand. Although it's called a 242, the engine is actually 237.5cc and everything about the bike is very similar to the Fantic 240 of the same era."

1984 YAMAHA 250R

A decade after Yamaha launched the TY twinshock, they launched a monoshock trials bike in two formats: one called the TY250S (S for street) a road-legal machine with full lighting kit, and another called the TY250R (R for, er... competition) which was the pure trials iron.

The bikes shared the same six-speed, autolube, two-stroke engine and a slim, diamond-type, high-tensile steel frame with linked single-shock Monocross suspension.

Dave says: "I bought my 250R off eBay, from a bloke in Wrexham. It was sat in a shed with a seized clutch, seized solid. But at least I got the bike in one complete lump, which



ABOVE: Yamaha 250R is a pure, competition-focused trials iron



Dave didn't have to travel far to buy his Fantic Trial 300

is more than can be said for many of the bikes I buy. I already had a street model, so I had loads of spares. It needed a total strip and was then rebuilt to its former glory. It's pretty standard apart from the Rock Shox.

"I started off on twinshock trials bikes, but with modern bikes you get better technology all the time. Even the old twinshock bikes handle better with modern equipment, like shocks. The Yamaha Monocross rear end is beautiful. There's so much more adjustment, so you can set up the bike to suit your weight. And, of course, you can rebuild them. With the old Betor units you had on twinshock bikes, like my Bultacos, that was it – no adjustment of any kind."

1984 FANTIC TRIAL 300

Dave had owned a new Fantic 240 when he was competing in trials on a regular basis. "It was a really good bike, and

John Lampkin hops it up on a Fantic back in the day



RIGHT: This Montesa Honda 315R looked pretty good after Dave cleaned it up... but he couldn't help going to town on it



ever since I had got into restoration, I'd always fancied getting hold of another Fantic," he says.

For trials enthusiasts, the 1980s was the decade that defined Fantic – it was then that the company began to dominate the premier events. Thierry Michaud had been runner-up in the 1984 championship, then won in 1985, '86 and '88 on the Italian-built machines. Fantic also enjoyed seven wins in the prestigious Scottish Six Days Trial (Michaud from 1984-86 and Brit Steve Saunders '88 and '89).

Dave's Fantic is a 1984 Trial 300 – but despite the name, the model was produced with a 250cc two-stroke engine. "There I was, just scanning through eBay one evening as usual, and it was: 'Bloody 'ell, there's a 300 in Church Stretton' – just down the road from where I live. And what's more, it was a mate selling it – and he hadn't even mentioned it to me before he put it online! He asked me what I wanted it for; I told it would be a keeper, so he sold it to me.

"I stripped and rebuilt it. It was in quite good nick, but still needed restoring, so I stripped it completely and rebuilt it. I found a couple of sets of new plastics for it. Bob Wright used to be the Fantic dealer; he had a brand new side panel, then another bloke had one for sale on eBay. The rear mudguard is brand new original; I got it off Bill Pye, who specialises in Fantic spares, that cost me £100. I had a front mudguard off

him and a tool box, too. They're like hen's teeth! Then at a show in Bristol there was someone selling Fantic spares and I picked up an original powder-coated exhaust."

2000 MONTESA HONDA 315R

Economic unrest in Spain during the early 1980s had led to a downturn in the firm's fortunes and that's when Honda stepped in with financial help in 1985 and took the company to new highs. In 2000, the same year Dave's Montesa Honda 315R was produced, British trials legend Dougie Lampkin had switched to Montesa. He'd ridden to three successive outdoor world titles (1997-99) with Beta, but continued his dominance of the series with a HRC-backed Montesa to claim the outdoor title a fourth time. Not only that, he would go on to win the outdoor title with Montesa again in 2001, '02 and '03. He also won the indoor trials title in 2001.

Dave's access to Montesa Honda was a bit more down to earth, however. He says: "I met a bloke at a car boot with my mate Keith [another Bantam collector we featured in CB September 2019] and we got talking about trials bikes. The bloke said he had a 250cc Montesa and I offered to buy it.

"The thing was really rough to look at, although after an hour of cleaning it came up really well and was looking good. But then I got carried away. I had the original rear rim



RIGHT: 2014 Gas Gas 300R was bought due to Dave's desire for a bike with modern technology

**'THIS IS THE LAST DRAYTON FRAME
MADE FOR A BANTAM BY 'MR
DRAYTON' - JIM PICKERING'**



This represents a bit of crossover to Dave's other collecting obsession: a 2019 Drayton Bantam

LEFT: Armstrong Hiro 250 is taking the well travelled path across Dave's restoration bench



powder-coated, new spokes and new discs. I modified the rear hub to run the caliper inside, as per the later models. It's also got a four-pot front brake caliper now instead of a two-pot. And I've fitted Hel cables. There's also later Montesa 4RT front and rear mudguards. I made the exhaust cover at the rear and fabricated the front. It's also got non-standard Renthal Fatbars and different clamps, bendy levers and a new clutch. It's easy to get spares for bikes like these, although the motors are bullet-proof anyway, so they should never need too much attention."

2014 GASGAS 300R

Of all Dave's bikes, this Gas Gas is the most modern. It may not be a classic, but it's a key bike in his collection. "I wanted a bike with modern technology and this is the real McCoy," says Dave. "The engine is tuned to perfection and it's got the right shocks. You pay more for the R model, but they were the best spec'd. There's also a Pro model, but with the R you get extra goodies."

GasGas emerged in 1985 and the bikes are still hand-built at the factory in Salt, Catalonia. Recently it has won the outdoor world title in 2005 and '06 with Adam Raga, who also won the indoor world crown in '03, '04, '05 and '06.

Dave adds: "This bike had been well used by the time I bought it, and it wasn't even that old – it had just been abused and neglected. I totally stripped it and rebuilt it. I went to John Shirt for spares and bought new mudguards, graphics, tyres, sprockets, chain, disc, caliper, bars, levers and exhaust. It would probably have been cheaper to buy a brand new bike but I get enjoyment from building bikes. I can look at this and say I rebuilt it."

2019 DRAYTON BANTAM

It seems only fitting that we should include a Bantam trials bike in the collection of man who has dedicated so much of his spare time restoring the venerable British two-strokes. But this is way beyond a conventional BSA Bantam.

"This is the last Drayton frame made for a Bantam by Jim Pickering, who was Mr Drayton," says Dave. "The forks are Marzocchi, but I've a pair of REHs from Duncan McDonald



so the bike can be fully Scottish Pre-65 legal. I also have Rock Shocks for it. The engine has been bored to 186cc, it has a Rex Caunt crank and the head's modified for squish and skimmed. It's got a 12-tooth primary gear from Drayton and has a low second gear and higher fourth gear. It's got a stock clutch – with carefully-routed cable and a longer clutch arm; clutch pull is so light you wouldn't believe it's a Bantam clutch. The carb is a 626 Amal, jetted to suit the engine mods. Ignition is Electrics World electronic.

"Jerry Minchell built the wheels using aluminium hubs with SM Pro rims and spokes from Central Rims. It's got a Montesa 313 4RT front mudguard with hand-made brackets. The sprockets are Talon with a 420 chain by Renold."

1983 ARMSTRONG HIRO 250

"My latest project is this Armstrong 250 with a Hiro motor," says Dave, proudly showing his part-built machine. "The Hiro-engined bike was developed by Sammy Miller, but Hiro went bust, which led to Armstrong switching to Rotax."

Dave says: "The Armstrong Hiro range was hand-built; they only ever made a batch of 100 and this is number 32. It was advertised on Google, but I saw the bloke at Stafford. It was a complete bike and I fell in love with it. It's British!"

"It was all there, just looking a bit ropey. Its got RockShox and Marzocchi forks. You can still buy mudguards; in fact you can get everything. I needed an exhaust – and I knew I'd find one because I'm always bumping into people at shows."

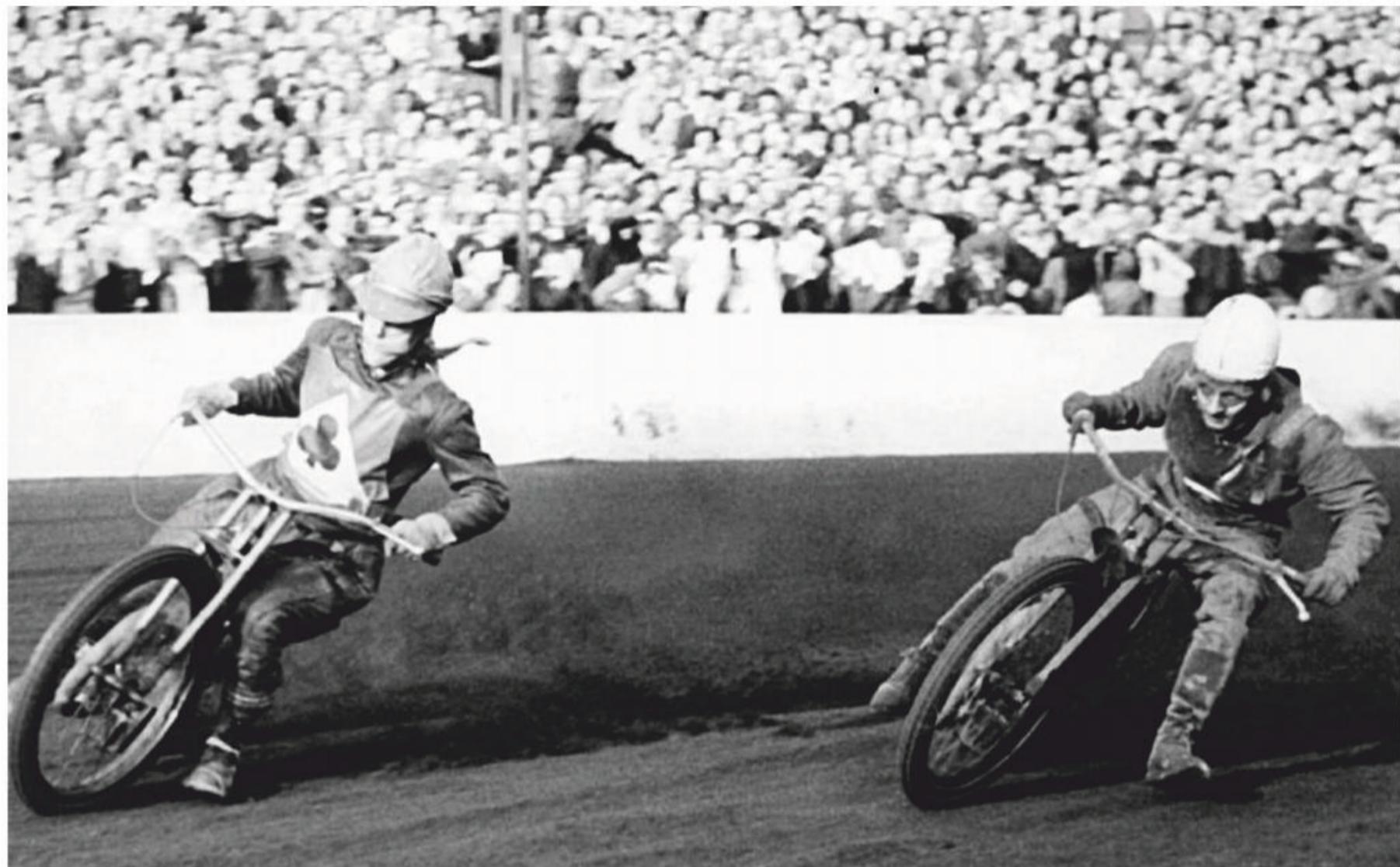
"Sure enough, I met Steve Saunders [former Armstrong works rider] at Stafford, mentioned I needed an exhaust and cheekily asked if he still had any spares. He didn't, but he said: 'You'll find someone here to help'. I spoke to Duncan McDonald of REH forks at the same show, who said he made the original press tools for the exhaust system and happened to have two spare exhausts at home. I got one for my bike at a bargain price!"

So what's next to add to the collection? What does Dave really desire? "You know, it's not so much what I really desire. It's what comes up. I just enjoy restoring old trials bikes." 



MAIN: Split models the famous Wembley Lions race jacket. An eye for adventure took him from the army to speedway stardom... and then to prison

RIGHT: Check out the packed crowd as Waterman scuttles up the inside of Belle Vue rider George Smith



SPEEDWAY'S POST-WAR ROCK STAR

SPLIT WATERMAN

We look back on the life of one of motorcycle racing's most colourful and entertaining characters

WORDS: BRIAN BURFORD, COURTESY SPEEDWAY STAR PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN SOMMERVILLE COLLECTION

With film-star looks and a daredevil personality, Squire Francis 'Split' Waterman was one of the speedway greats who helped drive thousands of spectators to the cinder tracks in the immediate post-war period. This larger-than-life character was also involved in several brushes with officialdom – one of which brought the fans out to protest in dramatic style.

In 1952, among the bowler hat-wearing, austere-suited businessmen in Pall Mall, London, were a group of men protesting outside the RAC headquarters wearing sandwich boards which read: 'Fair Play for Split Waterman'.

Waterman was appearing before a Speedway Control Board of Inquiry on July 8, for walking out of a British Match Race against Jack Young at West Ham the previous month. The court 'severely reprimanded' Split and he was warned as to his future conduct.

Waterman, who died in his sleep on Tuesday, October 8, was no stranger to challenging authority in both the sport in which he made his name or in Civvy Street. Nevertheless, the protest illustrates what a superstar he was in speedway – even in today's proactive world of social media, it's doubtful any of today's sporting stars would enjoy similar support.

With his film star looks (he was likened to movie idol Errol Flynn in his day) and a wicked twinkle in his eye,

Waterman was more than just a world-class speedway rider – he was a glamorous character who was loved by supporters and the press alike. Stories of his escapades – some true, many fabricated – followed him around. When he was in town, there was always going to be excitement.

Waterman was born in New Malden, south-west London on July 27, 1923, and was initially a toolmaker's apprentice



Fans protest in Pall Mall against Split's treatment by the authorities



Split (left) puts his good foot forward to pass Belle Vue's leg-trailing Wally Lloyd

'THE SURGEONS WERE GOING TO TAKE MY LEG OFF!'



Split, in the famed speedway Golden Helmet, gives arch rival Jack Parker a 'backie'



Split (second right) was hands-on with bike prep. He talks tech with engineer Wal Phillips (right)



before the outbreak of war. He joined the Royal Fusiliers and was posted to North Africa where he was involved in the Allied invasion of Italy, participating in one of the pivotal engagements at Monte Casino in 1944.

He recounted combat with a German paratrooper in which it was a 'him or me' situation and admitted that, even though he wasn't of a religious disposition, his taking of another life encouraged him to prayer. During the engagement he suffered shrapnel wounds which removed him from the front line and he was transferred to the Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers (REME).

"They put up a notice asking for people who could ride motorcycles, so I put my name down," recalled Waterman. "We did a 100-mile road race from Naples and I won it – more by luck than judgment – then we started speedway in a running stadium. And I started winning things there.

"They gave me a set of leathers, but the stitching wasn't very good. I went out on my first day and split them back to front. They used to call me 'Split Arse'. Of course they couldn't call me 'Split Arse' on the speedway, so they just called me 'Split'."

On being posted to Germany, his commanding officer, Major Fenwick, recognised Waterman's motorcycle talents and, having served with Wembley's team manager Alec Jackson earlier in the conflict, Fenwick wrote to him recommending Squire. He had some leave due and presented himself to Jackson, who sent him to Rye House where he spent most of his leave racing around Rye.

He joined the Wembley Lions and, technically, he was still in the army as he made his Empire Stadium debut on May 8, 1947. He was officially demobbed the next day.

Split helped Wembley to two league titles in 1947 and '49, and he won the prestigious London Riders' Championship in 1948. Jackson also noted that such was his engaging and cheerful personality that he contributed enormously to the team spirit.

By now a regular choice for England (he captained the side against Australia in '53), in 1950 he moved to Harringay for a transfer fee of £3000 – a record at the time – and qualified for his first world final, finishing seventh.

Very much at the forefront of the new generation of post-war stars who had come out of the forces looking for further adventure, a year later he faced Jack Young and Jack Biggs in a run-off for the world title. Waterman didn't make the best of starts in the run-off – and by the time he'd passed Biggs, Young was too far ahead to be overhauled.

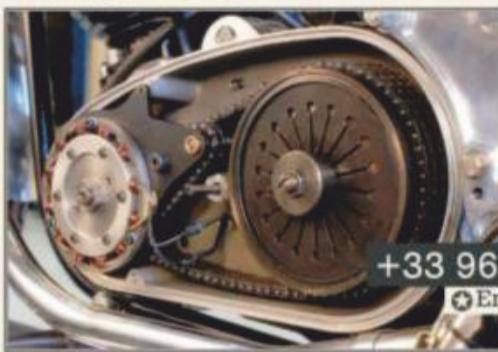
The next season he'd relieved Jack Parker of his 'pension' by winning the British Match Race Championship. He entered the 1951-52 close season as the holder and began the following year with a successful defence over Jack Young – but the authorities took Waterman's title away when he was sidelined by injury.

This led to his appearance before the SCB at the RAC's Pall Mall HQ. He was selected to face Jack Young as the June challenger and in the first race Young dived down the inside of his rival and Waterman came off. The race was stopped and it was announced that Split would be fit for the rerun, which he won. On his return to the pits, he was astonished to find that the initial staging had been awarded to Young and it was now 1-1, and not 1-0 in his favour.

Naturally, he protested and was so angered that he walked out. The ensuing furore meant he had to have a police escort to leave West Ham. He was punished for his indiscretion, yet the Speedway Control Board were not quite done with reminding him that they held the ultimate power.

On September 6, he crashed at Bradford, badly fracturing his knee and knocking out two front teeth. Alarmingly, he then faced a drastic situation when two surgeons began

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SPLIT WATERMAN

arguing over who should carry out what they thought was necessary treatment. "They were going to take my leg off," said Waterman. "The argument was who was going to do the operation! The knee was so bad, apparently, that they thought amputation was the best thing to do."

Fortunately, Harringay boss, Wal Phillips, and Split's future wife, Avril, hastily stepped in and he was transferred to the Royal Northern in London where his knee (and the rest of the limb) was saved – although forever afterward his shattered knee troubled him.

In 1953 he had to settle for world championship silver again. This time he entered his final race unbeaten and met Fred Williams (who had dropped just one point) and Olle Nygren. Unfortunately, Waterman's clutch was playing up and he made a less-than-brilliant start. His rivals crowded him out on the first turn and a second runner-up place was entered by his name in the history books.

After Harringay's closure he rode for a succession of clubs, including West Ham, another year at Wembley, Wimbledon, Southampton, New Cross, and a few weeks with Belle Vue and Ipswich before calling time on his career at the end of 1962.

Squire Waterman went into the sheet metal business and injection moulding, producing plastic kits for Airfix among others. He admitted his high-profile status afforded him some privileges that cemented his rakish reputation.

"The people who worked at Wembley were ex-Old Bill," Split revealed in a book called *Speedway: The Greatest Moments*. "And that's how I used to get out of trouble. What sort of trouble? You name it, I've done it."

Five years after hanging up his leathers, his old contacts were powerless to prevent him from being sentenced at the Old Bailey to four years imprisonment for gold smuggling and illegal arms possession (see right).

However, on being released, he married long-time sweetheart Avril Priston in Caxton Hall, London in 1970, and moved to Nerja on Spain's Costa del Sol, although he would, periodically, return to England on business.

He once said of his career: "I was quite happy with what I did. I just liked racing. What I liked more than anything was winning."

From bikes and cinders TO GUNS AND GOLD

SPLIT WATERMAN'S daredevil antics and brushes with officialdom took on a whole new direction once he had quit speedway.

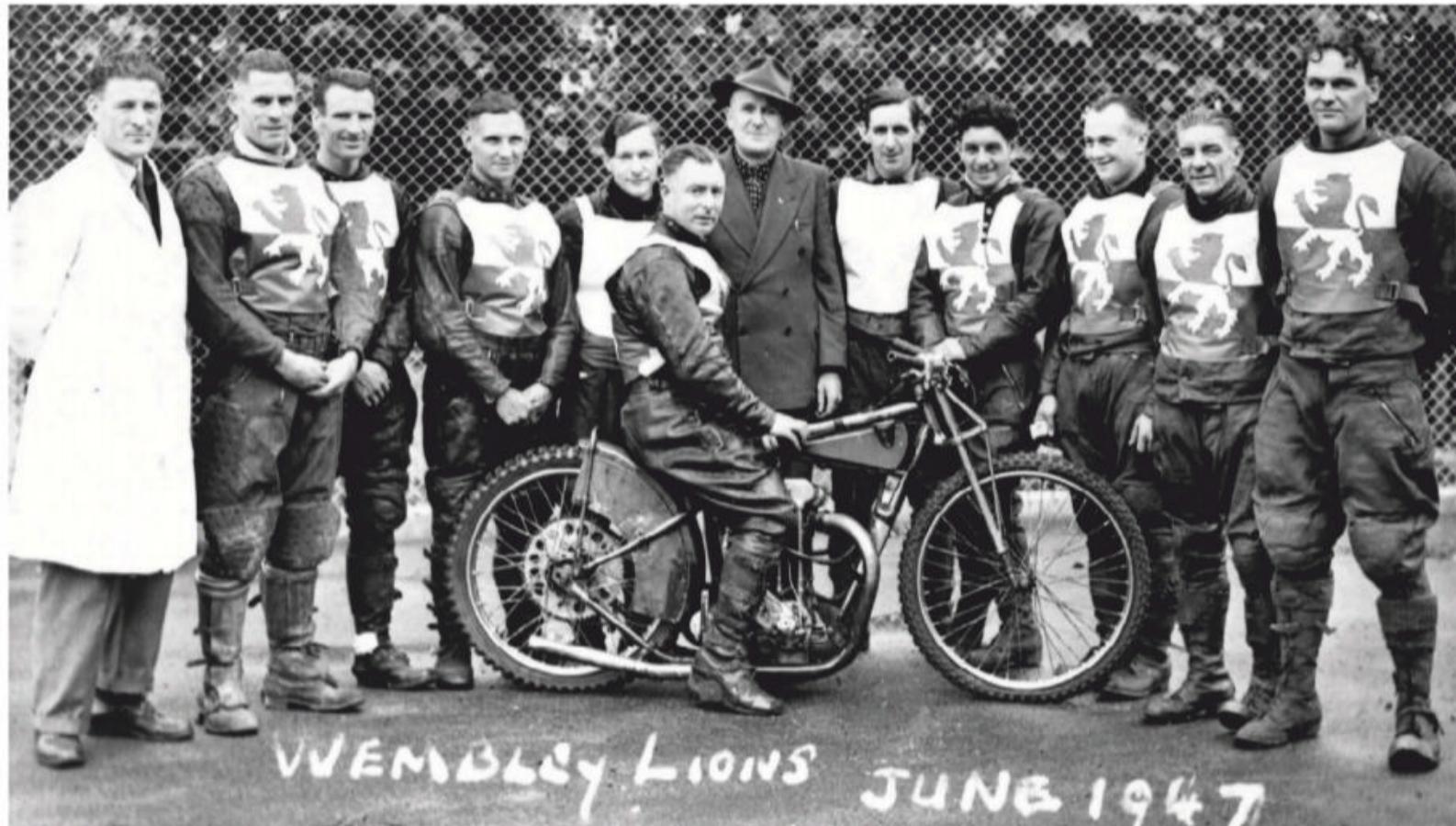
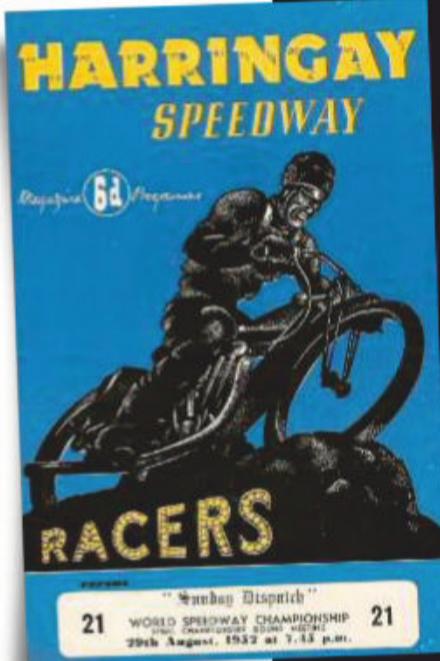
In 1968 he was sentenced at the Old Bailey to four years in jail for attempting to illegally export £10,000 worth of gold, having been arrested in Newhaven in 1967 while attempting to take a ferry to Dieppe.

According to newspaper reports of the trial, the gold was said to be part of a £750,000 bullion robbery in Clerkenwell the previous year. The judge accepted Waterman wasn't part of the gang who performed the bullion robbery, but said he was: "a useful ally to them, prepared to face danger and take risks, a gun runner in Africa, and was unable to resist the financial attraction and risk of adventure."

The authorities had discovered the gold hidden in the hollowed chassis of a car owned by his fiancée, Avril Priston. Waterman also pleaded guilty to unlawful possession of two sub-machine guns, two rifles, three pistols and ammunition. He was also found guilty of possessing dies which could have been used for making £5 gold coins and half-crowns.

Avril Priston (38) pleaded guilty to conspiring with Waterman to export the gold, as well as possession of firearms. She was given a six-month prison sentence.

Once the pair had been released, they married in 1970 and moved to the Costa del Sol, but Waterman again found himself in trouble when, in 1977, he was given a three-and-a-half-year sentence by a court in Milan for possessing forged Spanish currency worth £500,000.



LEFT: Wembley Lions with Split fourth from the right. He'd made his debut for the team in May that year and they went on to win the 1947 league title

WIN

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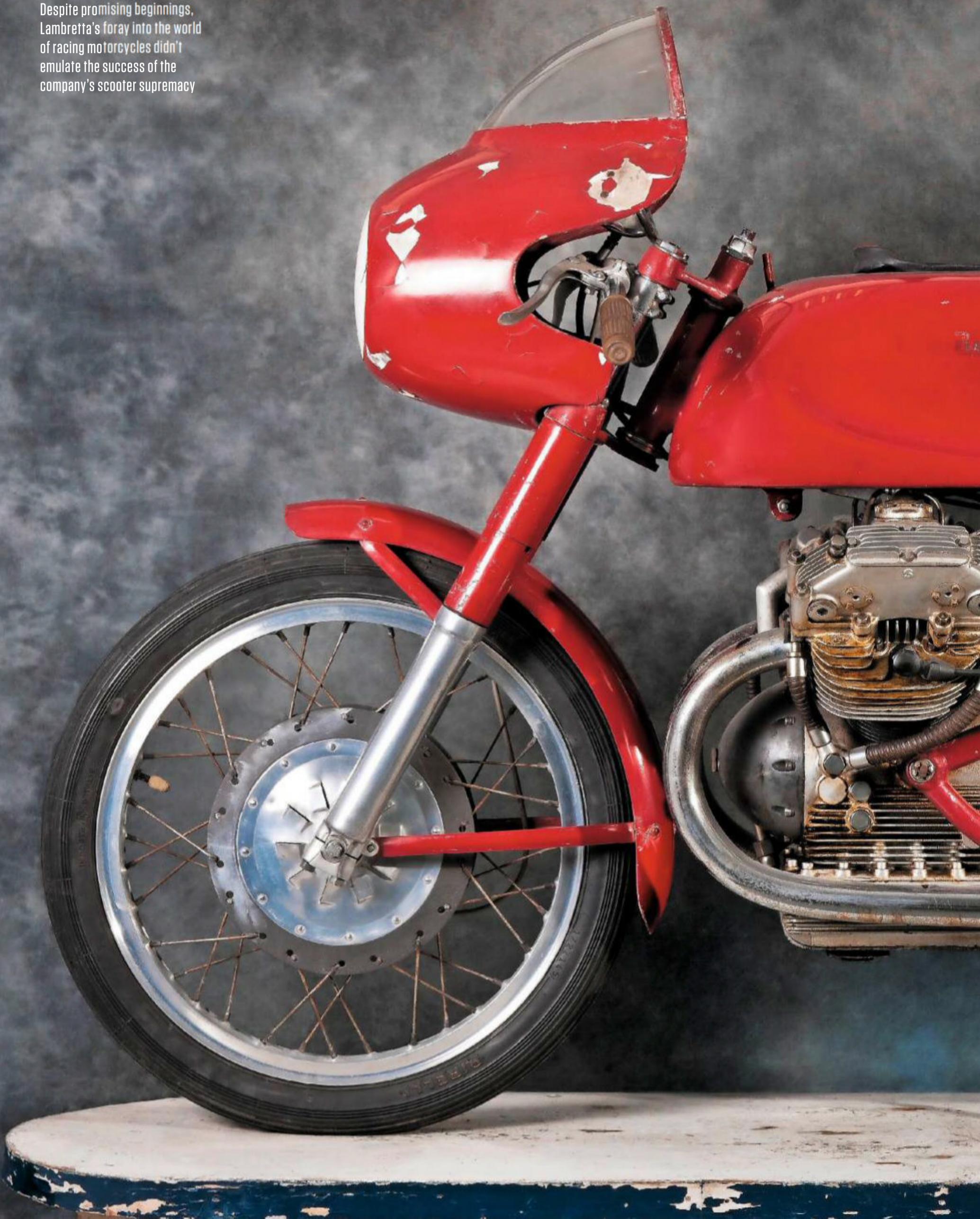
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d'ELEGANCE

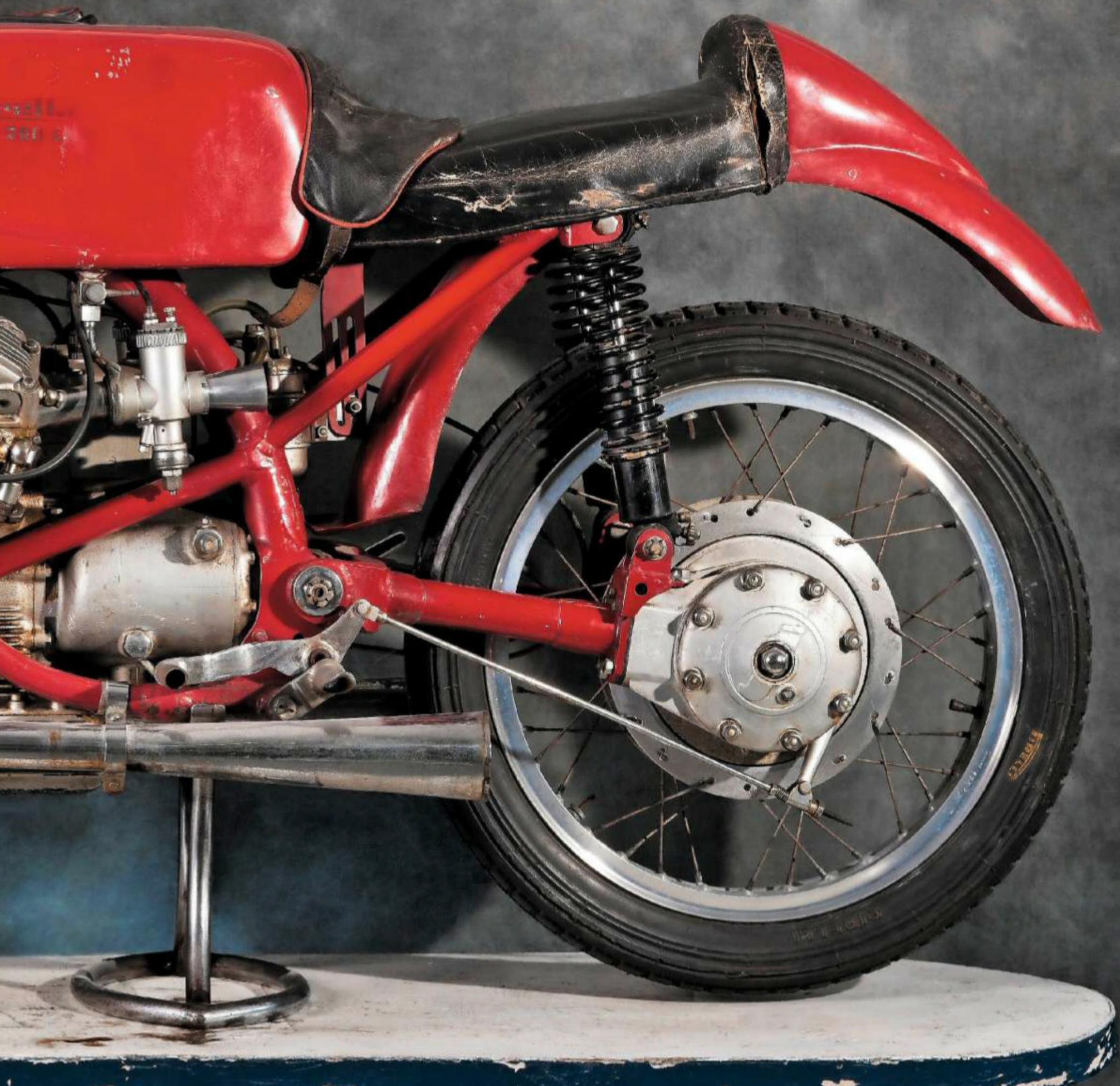
Despite promising beginnings, Lambretta's foray into the world of racing motorcycles didn't emulate the success of the company's scooter supremacy

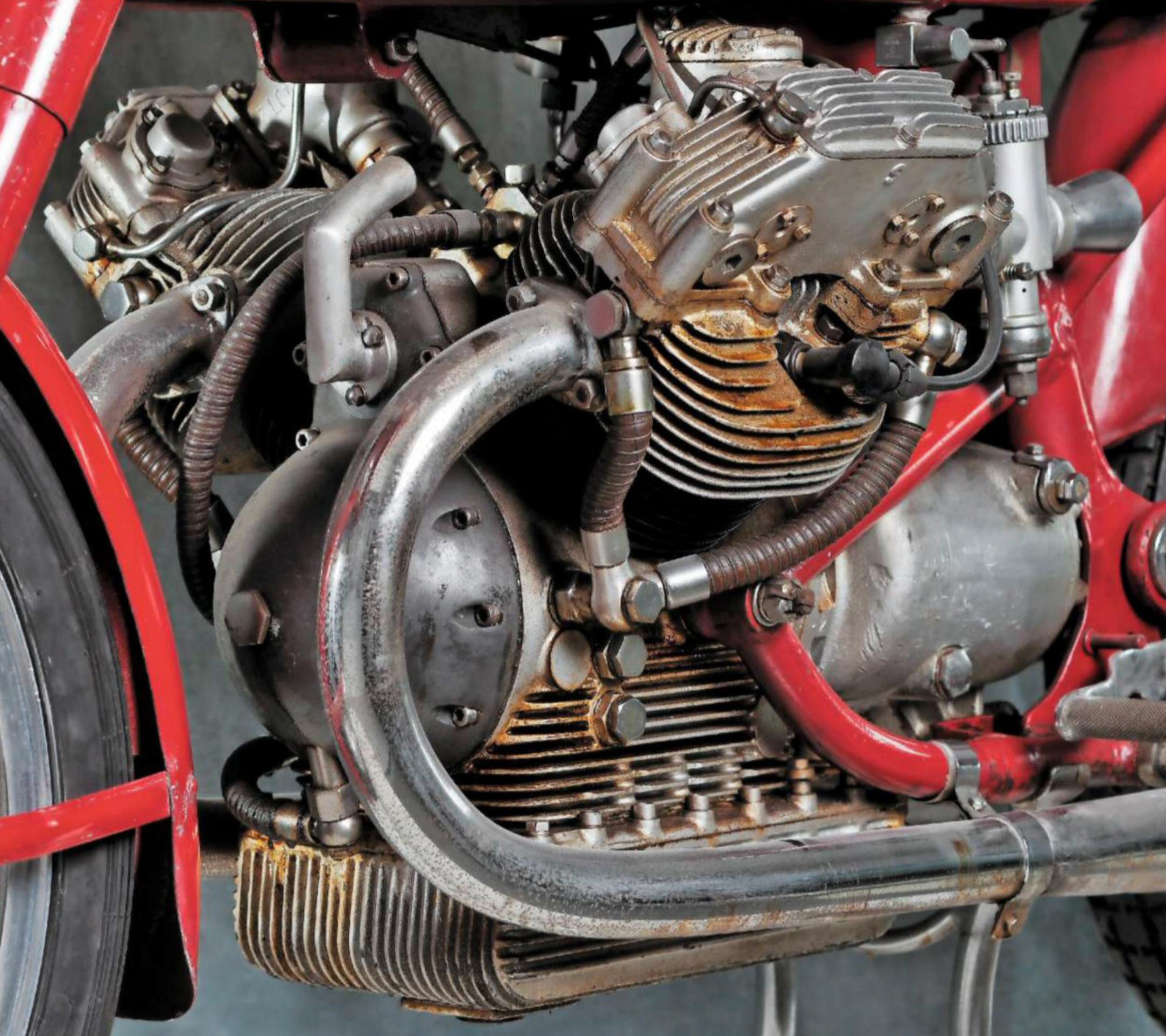


LAMBRETTA'S V-TWIN

The famous Italian scooter company hoped this 250cc GP racer would spark a whole new range of motorcycles to boost its strength in the growing two-wheeler market of the 1950s

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL AYNSTY

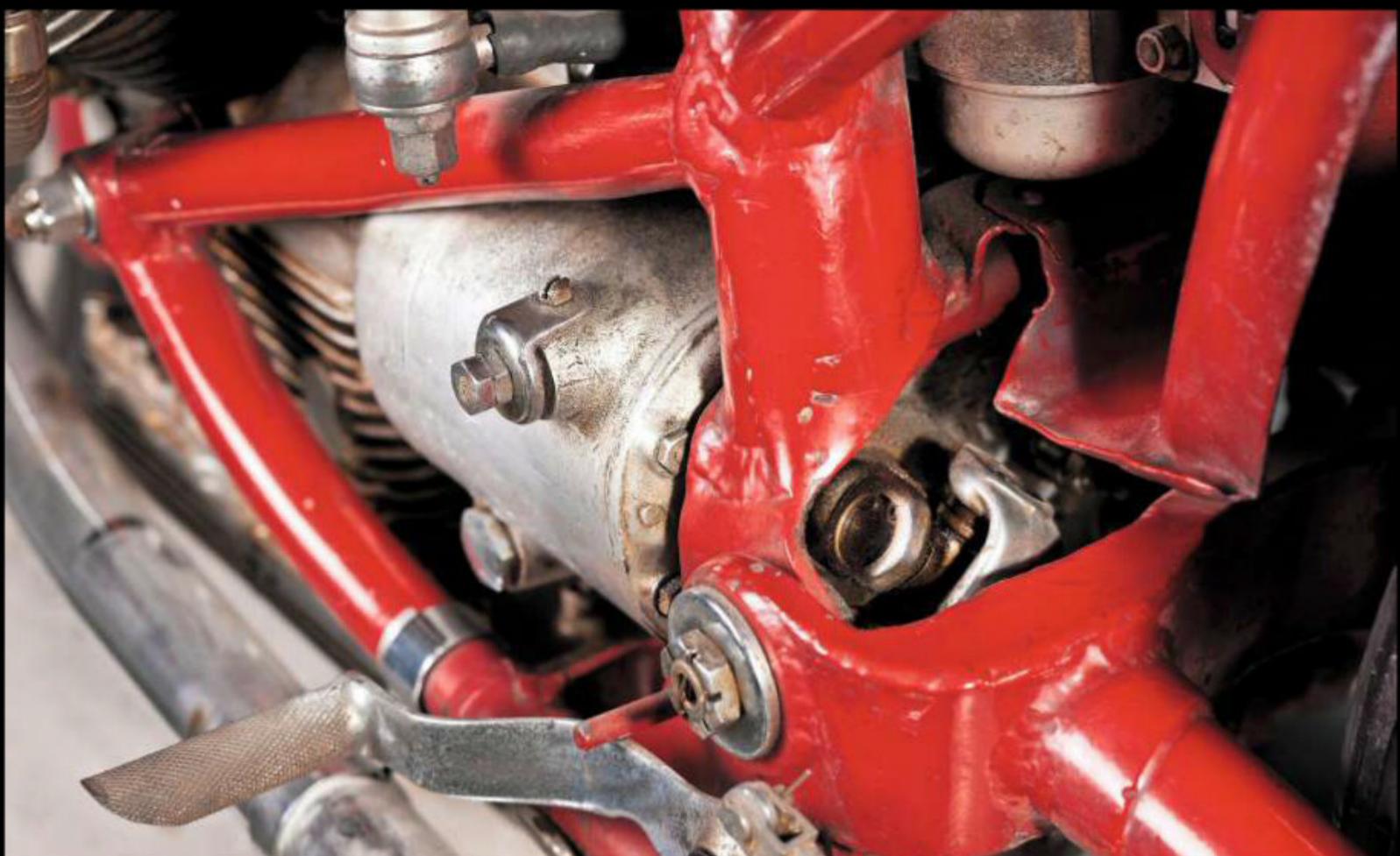




TOP: Engine configuration predated Moto Guzzi. ABOVE: Front-brake cooling ducts



Original rear suspension had scissor dampers, hydraulic units came later



The final drive shaft was housed inside the left-hand swingarm, with a universal joint at the gearbox output

'CAMSHAFT DRIVE WAS BY A SHAFT AND STRAIGHT-CUT BEVEL GEARS, SUPPORTED BY BALL RACE BEARINGS'

It might seem strange now to learn that one of the most prolific of the Italian scooter manufacturers had ever developed a conventional motorcycle with the intention of racing it in Grands Prix but there was good reason for the Lambretta 250cc V-twin.

Lambretta was the brainchild of former blacksmith Ferdinando Innocenti. He had established Innocenti, his own machining company, in the Lambrate suburb of Milan – and created the Lambretta scooter to fulfil a demand for post-war, low-cost commuter two-wheelers.

At this point there are two different views as to why the Lambretta racer was conceived. One story is that by the late 1940s/early '50s, other manufacturers were threatening to muscle in on the lucrative scooter market, so Innocenti countered the threat by commissioning a conventional two-wheeler to show Lambretta had the means to muscle in on *their* market! The other is that Lambretta wanted to break into the motorcycle market, but Moto Guzzi vehemently opposed the move.

Whichever one is true, the fact is that Lambretta pulled a master stroke at the 1951 Milan Show by launching their 250-class, 90° V-twin race bike – a dry-sump, single-overhead-cam design which would eventually evolve into a wet-sump, double-overhead-cam bike by the time it was retired in 1953.

The first prototype was designed by the gifted engineer Giuseppe Salmaggi who, pre-war, had worked for Belgian manufacturer Saroléa before joining Gilera to create the Saturno single in 1939. Post-war, he had joined Parilla to develop a 250cc overhead-camshaft single-cylinder racer along with other machines.

The sad thing was that the company never pursued the project with any great commitment. The Lambretta was raced – although not particularly successfully – by

Romolo Ferri and Cirillo 'Nello' Pagani (the first-ever 125cc World Champion in 1949 riding a Mondial and the man who had debuted the Salmaggi-designed Parilla 350 in 1950). The innovative 247.3cc V-twin motor with bore and stroke of 54mm x 54mm used a shaft drive, the overall design concept predating the famous Moto Guzzi layout of the same configuration by some 13 years.

Each alloy cylinder head had a cam box cast integrally which housed its single overhead cam supported by roller and ball bearings. The heads featured two valves per cylinder, with triple valve springs and shim tappets. Camshaft drive was by a shaft and straight-cut bevel gears, supported by ball race bearings. The cooling fins were not only on the heads and barrels, but also on the rocker covers. In typical Italian style, the dry sump was also finned, as was the oil tank which was located under the racing seat.

The front of the engine cases carried the flywheel magneto and rev-counter drive, while the five-speed gearbox was bolted to the rear of the cases, with final drive delivered to the rear wheel by a shaft.

The frame featured a large-diameter top tube, but no front down-tubes. Front suspension was by 32mm conventional telescopic forks. Salmaggi experimented with a conventional twin-shock rear end (shown here) and a torsion-bar set-up with friction dampers.

The bike never enjoyed the fruits of a sustained racing programme, although after its retirement from the track it was used for occasional bike show displays until 1962. The example shown here, number one of the two built, was discovered abandoned amongst the rubbish in the Lambretta factory after it closed in 1972. ☺

Photographed in Milan, Italy. 2011.
Casa Lambretta collection.



Chas rattles through Ramsey on his Maxton Yamaha in 1977 in the 250 Junior TT. He won the race the year before, but in '77 the bike never made the finish

ClassicBike
AT LUNCH
WITH...



Chas Mortimer

He was a talented racer – multiple GP wins proved that – but Chas also had an elevated capacity for partying...

INTERVIEW: JOHN WESTLAKE PHOTOGRAPHY: CHAS MORTIMER ARCHIVE, JOHN WESTLAKE (PORTRAITS), BAUER ARCHIVE

By the time our main course arrives, Chas Mortimer is telling a story that contains all the elements of his dazzling racing career and an equally sparkling zest for life. There's speed, bravery, cunning and a devil-may-care glint in his eye that got him into all manner of scrapes, often involving beautiful women.

"I did the Czech GP in 1978 and then flew back to do the Vladivar Vodka 250 race at Oulton Park," he says, his public school accent seeming slightly out of place coming from a hard-as-nails 1970s GP racer. "I qualified on pole, got a good start and then a tw*t tried to go up the inside and knocked me off at the first corner. I got run over and broke my leg really badly – the surgeons in Crewe were talking about eight months in traction or losing the leg."

"I rang another surgeon – you knew all the good surgeons in those days – and he said he could do something, but I had to get myself down to London to see him. It was bad form for him to go into another surgeon's hospital, apparently. I had to work something out, so I got hold of John Cooper (the top British racer) and he borrowed an ambulance from Tom Wheatcroft (the owner of Donington Park) and John turned up in it to drive me to London. The doctors said it was crazy and that I could die, but I discharged myself anyway and off we went.

I could feel all the bones scraping against each other as we went down the motorway – it was just horrible.

"But it worked out and the surgeons in London did a brilliant job plating it – I walked out in a month and was only in plaster for six weeks." Chas pauses, a smile lingering on his lips as he sips his Chianti. "There was a lovely matron looking after me, who I got on very well with. My wife thought I was having an affair, but I really wasn't," he says, eyes twinkling at the memory of the non-affair. "She was a very lovely lady, though."

Famous for his playboy lifestyle in the '70s, Chas spent 10 years doing GPs and was at the pinnacle from 1972 to

1976, during which period he came second and third in 125 championships, third in 350s, and fourth, fifth and sixth in 250s. He won seven GPs (four of them at the Isle of Man) and would have won the 125 championship in 1972 if the rules hadn't allowed riders to drop their two lowest-scoring rounds – without that, his points total was 15 points more than the eventual winner, Angel Nieto.

His consistency was remarkable, especially given the frailty of the bikes and the often catastrophic nature of even the smallest crash. In that 1972 125 season, for example, he was only off the podium three times. Chas attributes this to his famously elevated capacity for partying.



"My finish record was very good because I never rode anywhere at 100%. I was too intent on having a good life. Now I look back and think I was a complete tw*t and should have concentrated far more. But I was too busy enjoying myself and meeting lots of beautiful young ladies. That's been my downfall all my life, but I don't regret it and I've never hurt anyone – all my old flames have remained friends."

Interestingly, if you look at Chas's race history, almost all his best results were on the most statistically lethal tracks, such as the Isle of Man. "At the more dangerous circuits everyone was riding at 90-95%, the same as me. Without being big-headed, I think I had as much ability as anyone who won a world championship, but I wasn't prepared to push to 100% because you knew in those days that if you crashed, you died. But at circuits like Assen which were slightly safer – but still dangerous – some riders pushed harder. I kept at 90-95% everywhere."

It also helped if you were lucky, and Chas admits he was. The most famous occasion was when he was the only man to walk away from the horrendous 12-rider crash that killed Jarno Saarinen and Renzo Pasolini in 1973 at Monza. "I

The waitress delivers another glass of red – true to his playboy reputation, Chas won't allow any water on the table – and I bring him back to the start of his career. Where did this addiction to racing come from? "Well, my grandfather was chief test pilot for Vickers during the war and he did the first flight on the Spitfire in 1932, among other things. We've got speed in our family. Dad raced at Brooklands pre-war, got a gold star on a Brough and a Norton, which you got for a 100mph lap.

"In 1962 dad wanted to get involved in bike racing again and he told Francis Beart (the Norton tuner) that he wanted to sponsor a young rider. They went down to Brands Hatch and picked out Joe Dunphy and Griff Jenkins. Francis sponsored Joe and dad sponsored Griff. They went over to do the Manx GP in 1963 and took me with them, so I saw Griff beat Peter Darvill [another Beart-sponsored rider] into second and Jimmy Guthrie in third.

"They were all Francis Beart bikes and all had to be stripped to check they weren't oversized, but Francis didn't have enough people. As a 14-year-old boy I was over the moon, being handed all these warm engine parts as they were taken off the bikes. Apart from a visit to the TT the previous year, that was my first involvement in racing and I thought: 'I really want to do this'."

Soon after, Chas's dad started the UK's first motorcycle race school where Paul Smart was one of the first pupils and later became an instructor. "My first race was July 25, 1965 at the Stars of Tomorrow at Brands Hatch on an RAS 250 Greeves. I finished fourth and Smarty won it. He was four or five years older than me, so I was always looking up to him.

"The next year, *Motorcycle News* started their Clubman Championship and dad sponsored Smarty and me. Smarty won the championship, but second place went down to the last round at Snetterton where I was fighting with a guy called John Blanchard. I got a good start and was in the lead, with John second, and down Snetterton's long straight I suddenly felt my bike speed up – Smarty had come alongside and was pushing me! Smarty won, I finished second and John third, and that's how the championship finished. Smarty and I have remained friends ever since."

Smarty pops up a lot in Chas's stories, usually accompanied by raucous laughter. When, for example, Chas had to take his Villa motor back to the factory in Modena, Smarty came along for the ride. "He'd met a lady in Finland and so had I, so we got in my Austin 1100 and drove non-stop to Italy. We dropped off the engine and set off to Finland. Bear in mind we'd been driving for 15 hours by then.

"Smarty was driving and I woke up around Stuttgart to a terrible crashing noise as trees and bushes hit the car. Smarty eventually stopped and said we'd had a blow-out, but of course we hadn't – he'd fallen asleep and veered off the road. Half the car was smashed up and only one light worked, but we carried on; 48 hours later we'd been stopped by the police about five times because of the lights being out, but we got to Stockholm to catch the ferry to Helsinki.

"We got off the boat and spent the night at my girlfriend's house which was near the port. The next morning we tried to set off for Imatra to see Smarty's lady, but it was -20°C and the battery was solid ice. We got another battery and the guy selling it saw the car and said we couldn't possibly drive any further because we had summer tyres. We told him it would be fine because we were English.

"By the time we got near Imatra we hadn't seen a car in ages and the road was sheet ice, so Smarty pulled the handbrake and the car did a full 360° and embedded itself in a snowbank. We were giggling, and kept the engine running while we waited for someone to come along and pull us out. But after 15 minutes no cars had passed and it dawned on me that we were in trouble – it was -30°C and we had less than a quarter of a tank of fuel.

"Smarty is hard as nails, but he was starting to panic



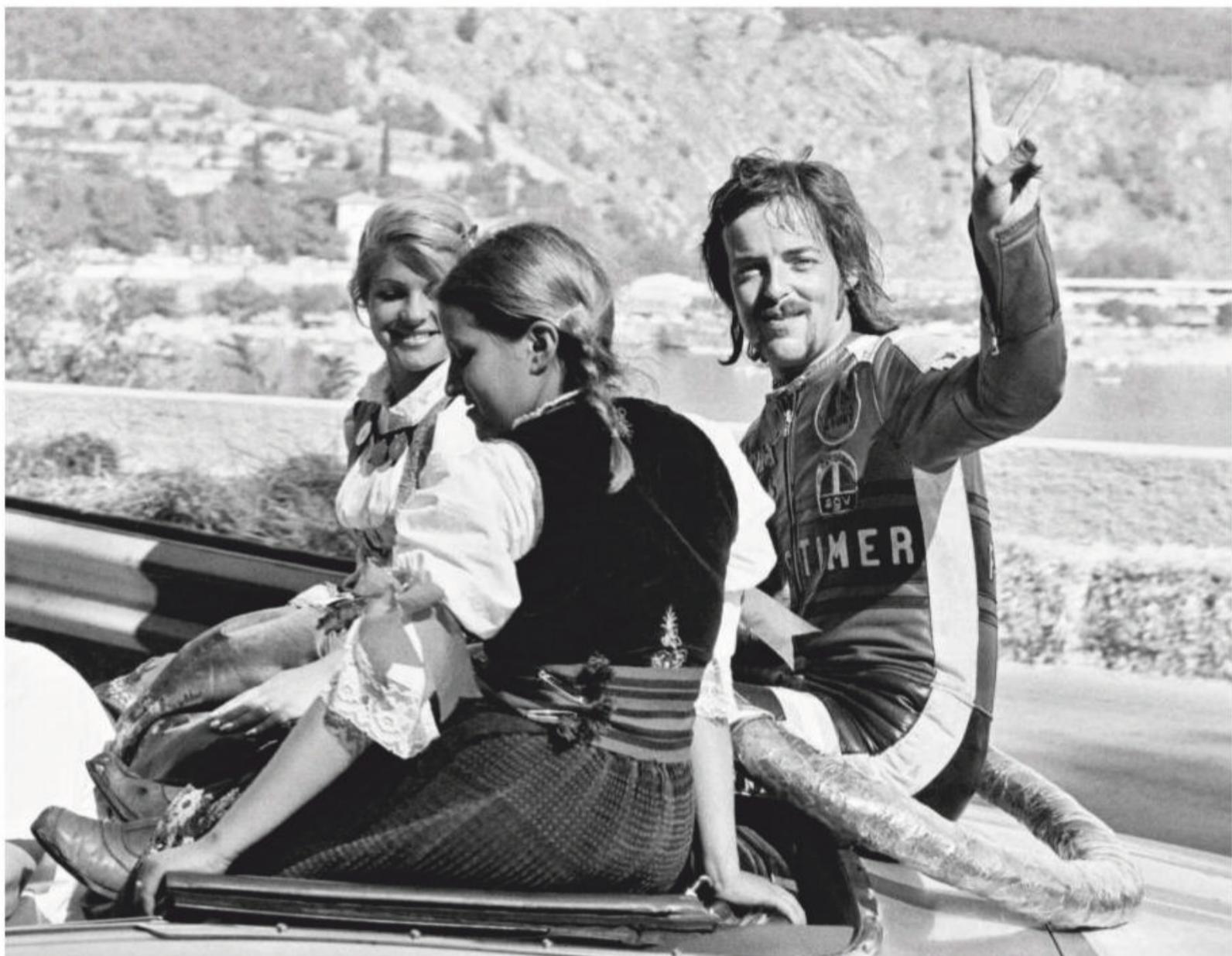
'THE CAR DID A FULL 360° AND EMBEDDED ITSELF IN A SNOWBANK'

can remember going into the Grand Curve, seeing Paso's bike seizing and thinking: 'f**k, this is going to be bad'.

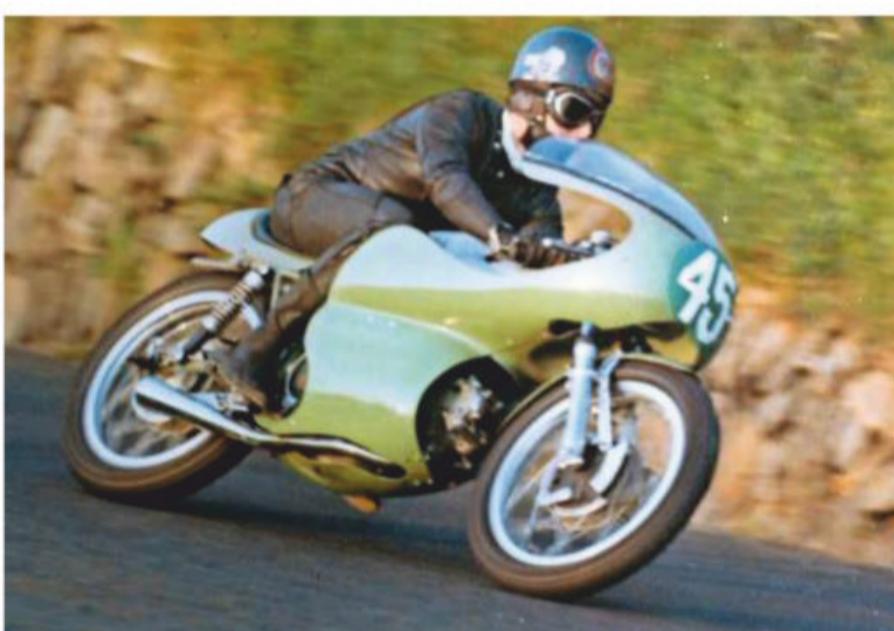
"Paso's bike hit the barrier, bounced back and burst into flames. I had no choice but to ride through the flames and Paso was right there – I just ran straight into him. I was right on the outside by the barrier when I hit him and my bike went up like that [gestures vertically] and I fell off and slid along by the barrier. All those who were so badly injured were towards the centre or inside of the circuit."

Now 70, Chas is a compelling raconteur, whose stories are peppered with mischievous grins as he relives moments of hilarity or high excitement (both often involving Paul Smart, but we'll come to that). This accident, however, has clearly left deep emotional scars. "I can still visualise the crash now," he says. "I can visualise going to Jarno and seeing most of his head was missing, and going to Kanaya [Japanese racer Hideo, who survived] and he was moaning.

"There were 12 of us in that crash and I was the only one who wasn't injured. What a charmed life I've lived – it was pure luck that I wasn't killed. It was bloody awful. I was getting flashbacks for a long time. But you have to make a decision to either continue in the life that you've known and loved for donkey's years, or go and be a normal person in a normal job. And I just couldn't j**k it in."



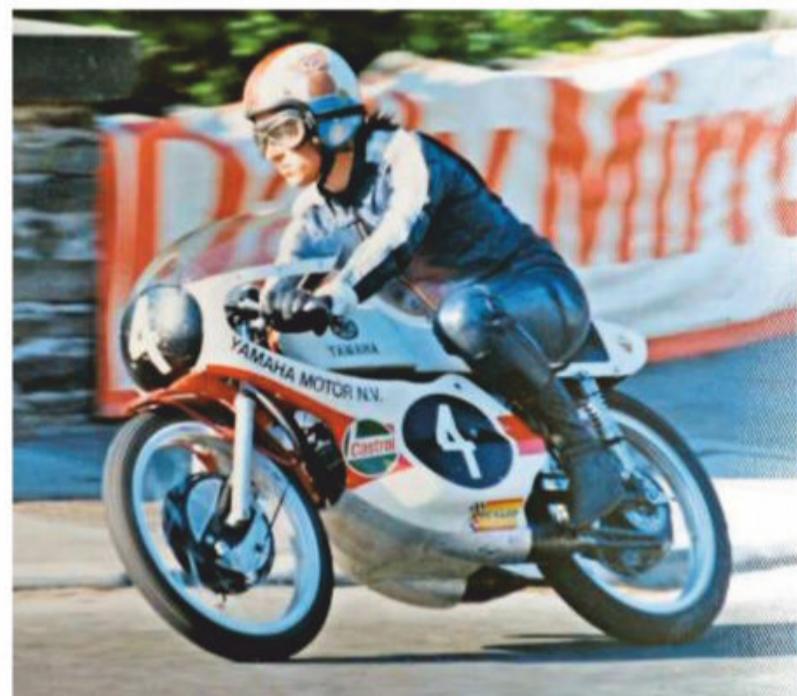
LEFT: Chas takes a victory lap after winning the 1974 Yugoslavian 250GP at Opatija. He actually did better in the 350cc class that year, coming fifth overall

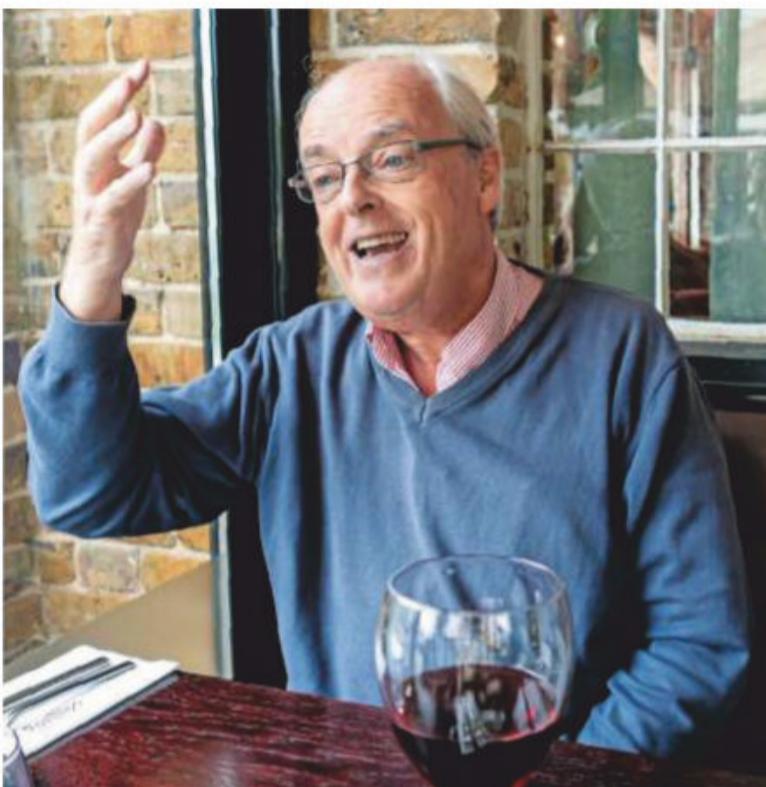


FAR LEFT: On a 250 Aermacchi in the 1968 Manx GP. He came fifth
LEFT: By 1972 Chas' fame had spread beyond bikes. Here's he's modelling a startling concoction from Moss Bros with *Penthouse Pet* Isabel Oribiyi

BELOW LEFT: The Duke of Edinburgh chats to riders before the 500 production TT in 1969. Chas (#70) was astonished by the Duke's memory: 'He remembered what bike I had been riding when I met him four years before.'

LEFT: On his Yamaha 125, practicing for the 1971 TT





'ONE OF THE PLACES THAT REALLY USED TO FRIGHTEN ME WAS SPA FRANCORCHAMPS'

and said he'd start walking back to Lappeenranta which was around six miles away. I told him he'd die – neither of us had winter clothes on. We had to sit it out in the car. After about two hours a car came along and the guy pulled us out. Once he saw the state of our car, he told us he'd drive with us to Imatra and then make sure we took it to a garage. So we stayed at Smarty's girlfriend's place until the tyres got done. This is the sort of thing the racers miss these days – they never have any fun."

By 1967 Chas was looking for the next step up, after coming second in the MCN Clubmans the year before. By chance, his dad had decided to get out of the racing school business, and he offered it to Chas on the condition that he never came to him for any more money. "He thought that common sense would prevail and I'd give up racing and run the school," says Chas, that impish grin appearing again. "But of course I closed the school, sold all the bikes and used the money to buy a few really good race bikes – a Honda CR93, a 350 Ducati and a 250 I can't remember."

With some fast bikes, his racing career was moving forward and in 1969 he started his first 125 GP. "It was in Finland and I finished sixth – I was pleased with that! But of course then you think 'I can do this easily' and we went to Czecho next and in the 125 race I didn't get a good start. I thought I'd overtake a couple of the MZ riders, lost the front end and the bike hit Jurgen Lenk [an East German rider] who then took out Kel Carruthers, who was leading the 250 championship. Kel was furious, swearing madly and laying into Lenk, who was trying to explain that he got hit by me. But Kel didn't hear. It was 20 years before I admitted to Kel that it was me..."

In 1970 Chas's results continued to improve. He scored two podiums, one on his 250, the other on his 350 (both Yamahas) and came sixth in the 250 championship. Then came those glory years when he was battling and often beating the best riders in the world. But the spectre of accidents was ever present, and in the end that caused Chas to question whether he should continue.

"One of the places that really used to frighten me was Spa Francorchamps, because so many people died there – I saw Christian Ravel [French champion and GP regular] get killed there in 1971. That was the only place I used to go to church before the race and used to ask him upstairs to keep me alive.

"I took the decision to pack it in when I wasn't in a position to be doing well. In 1976 I finished third in the 350 World Championship and in 1977 I had a massive accident at Daytona on a 250 and my helmet came off in mid-air – as I was flying through the air, I thought: 'That's it, I'm dead'. Steve Baker, Kenny Roberts, Steve McLaughlin and I were barrelling into the chicane and I outbraked McLaughlin but I went too deep, ran out of road, hit the straw bales and I flew over the top.

"When I landed, I saw blood all over my leathers and thought: 'Oh, I'm dead'. Then I thought: 'Hang on, surely dead people can't see this kind of thing'. Then I passed out."

It turned out the strap on Chas's experimental AGV helmet had rotted after being stored wet. "I was unbelievably lucky to survive. It affected me. The next year, I did GPs and wasn't riding very well. Instead of battling for third or fourth place behind the MVs, I was battling for ninth to 11th and at the end of the year I thought I'd stop GPs."

Eventually retirement loomed, but it was tough. "Stopping racing is so difficult because of the hole it leaves in your life. The travel, excitement, social life... it's so hard to give up. I dealt with it by going cold turkey and having nothing to do with racing for years. But when I tell modern racers about what we got up to, they can't believe it. I've had some fun in my life! And I wouldn't change any of it at all."

CHAS MORTIMER

A life well lived



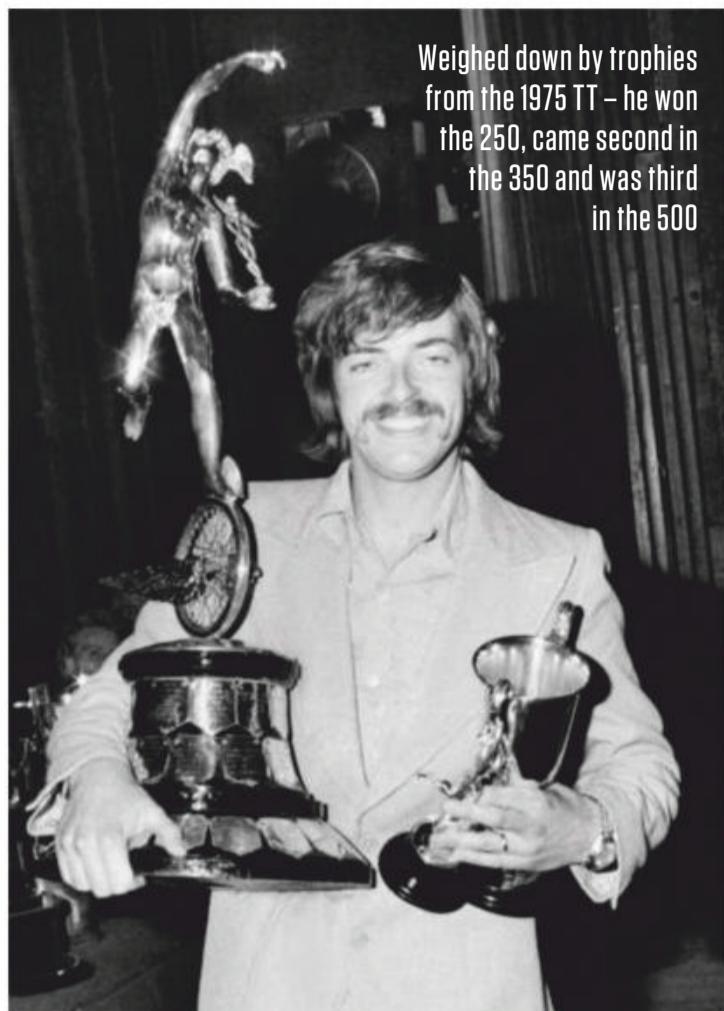
TRYING GPs
Chas first dipped his toe into GP racing in 1969, heading off to Finland with his 125cc Villa. Astonishingly, he came sixth. But he was still doing plenty of races at home in '69 – the shot above is from the Race the South at Brands.



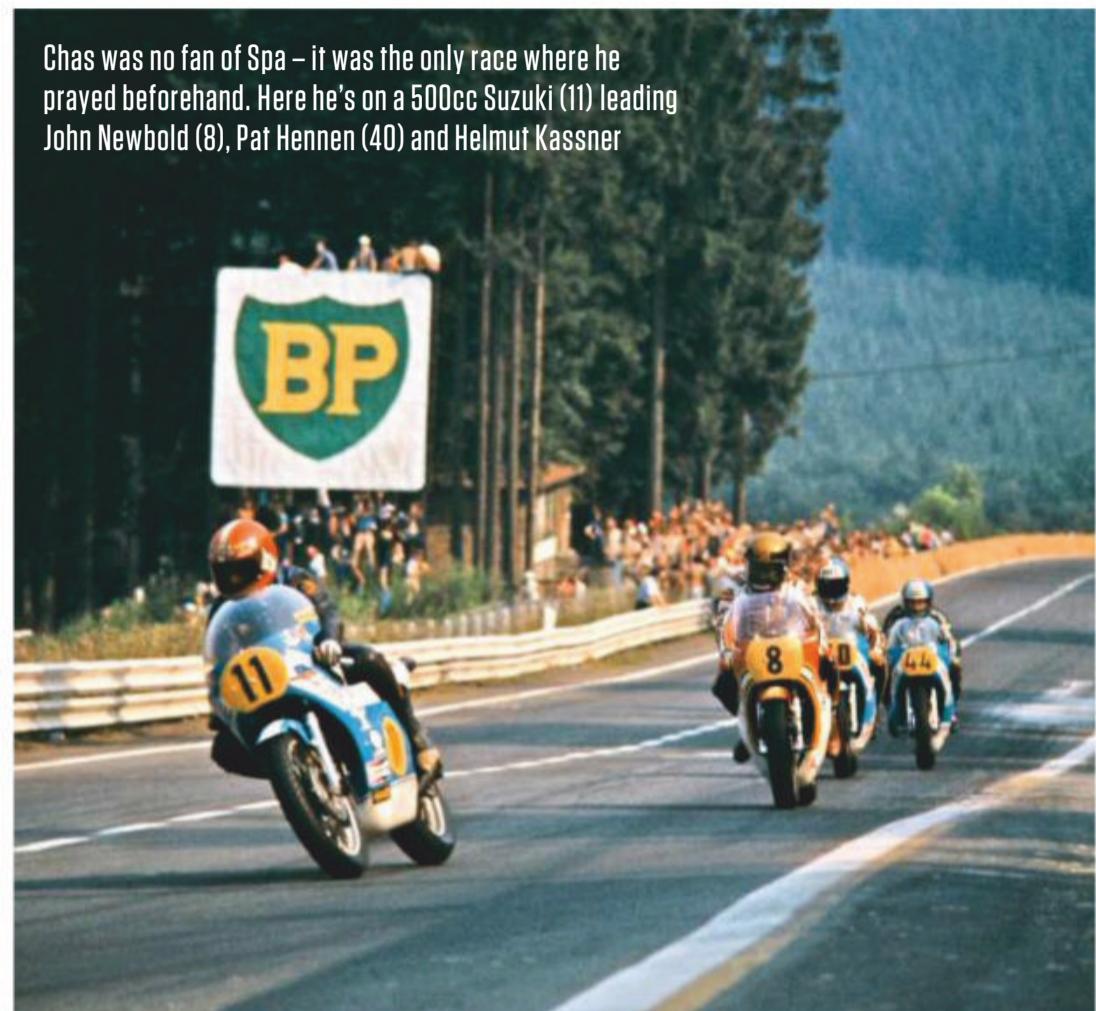
TT GIFT EVIDENT
This is Chas in the 1970 250 TT, where he came fourth. His second year in GPs had started superbly, with a third place on the 250 at the German GP. Though he only finished five 250 GPs that year, he still came sixth overall.



FACTORY MZ RIDE
In 1971 MZ were left without a rider at the TT. Chas stepped in (he's on the works 250 MZ in practice, above) but was prevented from racing it by an arcane bike-swapping regulation. Chas won the 125 TT, so it wasn't all bad.



Weighed down by trophies from the 1975 TT – he won the 250, came second in the 350 and was third in the 500

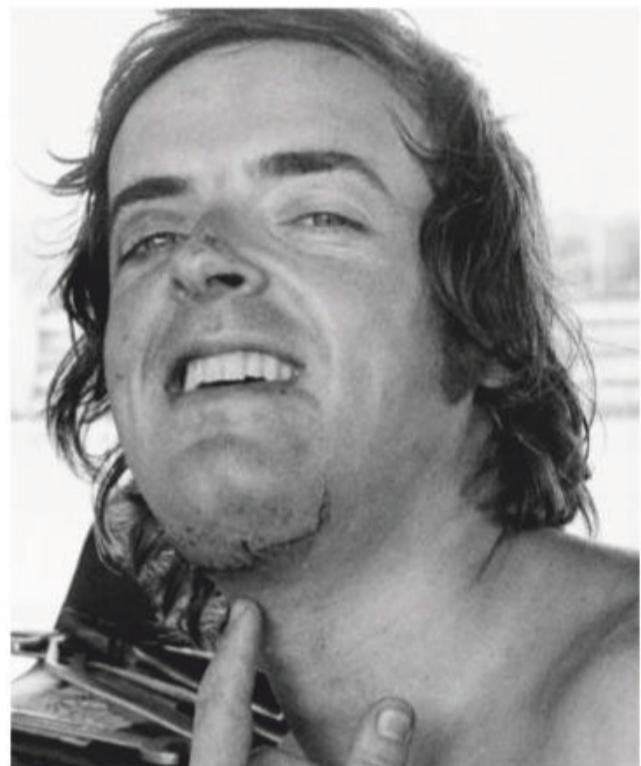


Chas was no fan of Spa – it was the only race where he prayed beforehand. Here he's on a 500cc Suzuki (11) leading John Newbold (8), Pat Hennen (40) and Helmut Kassner



LEFT: 1976, and Chas heads to victory in the Junior TT on his Yamaha

RIGHT: By the Venezuelan GP in April 1977, Chas' scars from the death-defying Daytona crash were still evident



CONTINENTAL CIRCUS

GPs weren't just about riding in the 1970s – the social life would make modern racers weep with envy. Chas made dozens of great mates – above, he's with Swiss GP star Philippe Coulon (left) who came sixth in the 1976 500 championship.



LIFE GOES ON

It's 1973 and Chas waits to go out at the Sachsenring on his Yamaha 125 (his mechanic is on the monkey bike). A great season for Chas in terms of results, but it was blighted by the death of Jarno Saarinen and Renzo Pasolini at Monza.



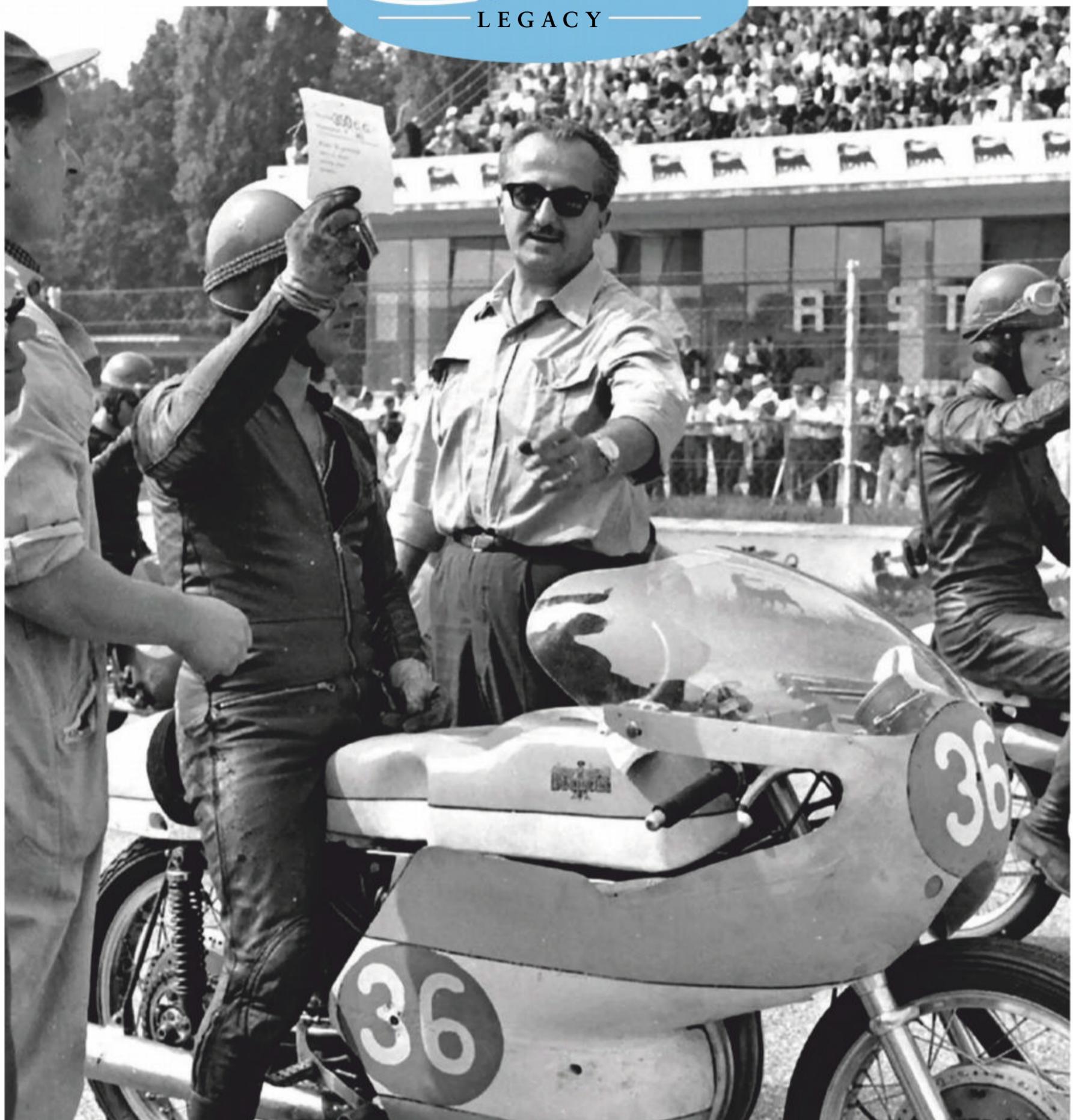
CLOSEST CALL

Chasing Kenny Roberts and Steve Baker in the 1977 250 race at Daytona, Chas outbraked himself, clipped some bales and flew over Steve McLaughlin. His helmet came off in mid-air (you can see it on the right). 'I was lucky to survive.'



AFTER RACING

In 1984 Chas (top right) agreed to run the Armstrong GP team with riders Niall Mackenzie (left) and Donny McLeod, who came second in the 1986 Belgian GP. Chas now runs a leading bike transportation firm.



Getting the blues

In our ongoing series on pivotal Italian designer Lino Tonti, we look at how the fortunes of former motorcycle giant Bianchi might have been different they had fully developed Tonti's 500cc racing twin

WORDS: ALAN CATHCART PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAN CATHCART ARCHIVE

The return of the Bianchi factory team to Grand Prix road racing in 1960 was as unexpected as it was quixotic. It had been almost 40 years since the 'Mighty Mouse', Tazio Nuvolari, had put Italy's oldest motorcycle manufacturer on the road racing map. He won a host of 1920s GPs, riding the magnificent dohc Freccia Celeste (Blue Arrow) 350cc single, painted in the company's trademark sky blue colours.

Bianchi's success continued in the '30s, as the company's close links with Mussolini's ruling Fascist party were exploited to allow it to boom commercially, becoming Italy's largest motorcycle and bicycle manufacturer. Bianchi moved into the 500cc class in 1935 with new superstar Dorino Serafini, albeit racing mainly in Italy due to widespread anti-Italian feeling abroad in the wake of the nation's invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), and the consequent League of Nations embargo on trading with the country.

By now the firm, which had grown out of the bicycle workshop which founder Edoardo Bianchi had established in Milan back in 1885, had become a huge automotive empire, producing cars, trucks and even aircraft as well as world-class bicycles.

Motorcycle racing initially took a back seat, but eventually Bianchi decided to follow Gilera's lead (to whom Serafini had switched in 1938) and developed a new supercharged 500cc four-cylinder racer. This appeared in public for the

'IN 1958, LINO TONTI WAS HIRED BY BIANCHI AS CHIEF ENGINEER'

LEFT: Remo Venturi on the Bianchi 350 with Lino Tonti alongside on the grid at the 1964 Italian GP, Monza

first time in 1940, but was never raced, after Italy joined in the war in support of Nazi Germany.

Bianchi's Viale Abruzzi factory in Milan was destroyed by Allied bombing in 1943, and it took until 1950 for the plant to be rebuilt. But before then Bianchi had managed to restart motorcycle production, and thus rode the wave of demand for economical post-war transportation, which fuelled the racing comeback of rival bike firms like Moto Guzzi and Gilera. Bianchi, however, chose not to race.

Edoardo Bianchi had passed away in 1946 at the age of 79, and it had been *Il Commendatore* who was most passionate about the sport. His son Giuseppe inherited

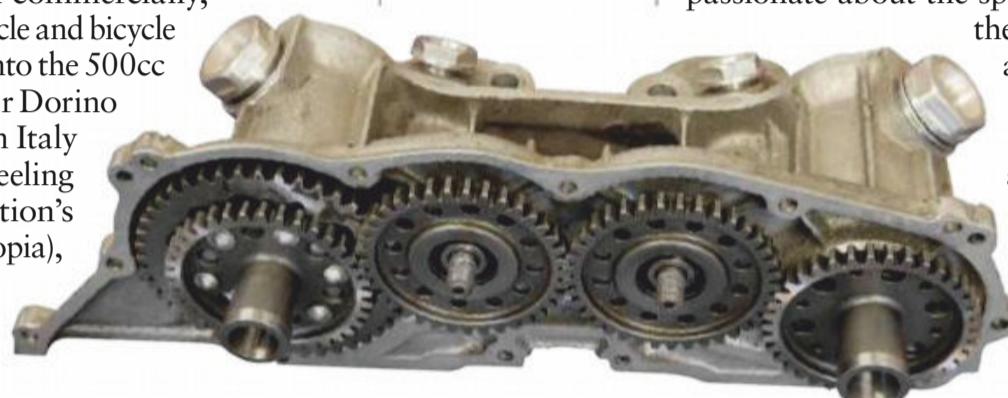
the company and fancied himself as a hard-nosed businessman. He'd travelled widely abroad pre-WWII, studying industrial management, and realised that bikes sold themselves in such a flourishing market, so why go racing? He instead spent Bianchi's race budget on buying bicycle success in backing legendary Italian rider Fausto Coppi.

In 1955 the company's four-wheel

division was sold to Fiat and renamed Autobianchi, so Fiat's Agnelli family had shrewdly removed the only potential threat to the Cinquecento's market dominance. However, cash from this sale didn't arrest Bianchi's commercial decline, so in the late '50s Giuseppe – by then spending much of his time in Australia, for personal reasons – decided to dust off his dad's idea of promoting Bianchi motorcycle sales by going Grand Prix racing again.

In September 1958, Lino Tonti was hired by Bianchi as chief engineer. His duties included responsibility not only for expanding its range of motorcycles, scooters and military bikes, and developing competitive 250/400cc off-roaders which duly won the Italian motocross championship, but also creating the Grand Prix road racers with which the historic Milan company intended to make its competition comeback, as a means of promoting the brand.

After failing to convince Bianchi directors to give him a budget big enough to develop a 250 four, Tonti



Above: this train of gears, between the cylinders of Tonti's Bianchi twin, drive the twin overhead camshafts

BELOW: Sadly, Lino Tonti's 1964 498cc Bianchi never competed in a 500GP race





In 1964, Tonti's 454cc Bianchi twin, ridden by Remo Venturi, beat the MV Agusta fours to win the Italian Championship. Here Venturi leads Mike Hailwood on an MV at Cesenatico.
BELOW: Tonti on a Bicilindrica in 1961



'contented' himself with designing a 250 twin which he fully intended from the beginning should be capable of being stretched to provide a modular contender for the 350 and 500cc classes as well. "This way, on a restricted budget, I could develop a single design capable of competing in all three classes," he said. But the 128kg 250cc, developing a claimed 34bhp at 11,500rpm, was too heavy against the early '60s Honda 250 fours weighing 10kg less, and producing up to 20bhp more.

The 1960 five-speed 250cc (55 x 52.5mm) twin – a more modern short-stroke design compared to the 53 x 56.4mm Mondial-Paton he'd worked on in 1958 before joining Bianchi – set the format for all Tonti's future Bianchi GP designs, irrespective of capacity. He first raised capacity to 348cc at the end of 1960 via a 10mm overbore, with 32mm Dell'Orto SS1 carbs replacing the 250's 27mm items, and also fitted a six-speed gearbox. This increased power to a claimed 50bhp at 10,600rpm, but the capacity was further increased to 386cc in 1961 to create the company's first Italian title-winning 500cc contender ridden by Tino Brambilla, still retaining the same 52.5mm stroke, but with a 68.4mm bore. Thereafter, capacity crept to 405cc, then to 425cc and finally to 454cc (70 x 59mm) for Remo Venturi to win the 1964 Italian 500cc championship, with a claimed 67bhp at 10,100rpm at his disposal.

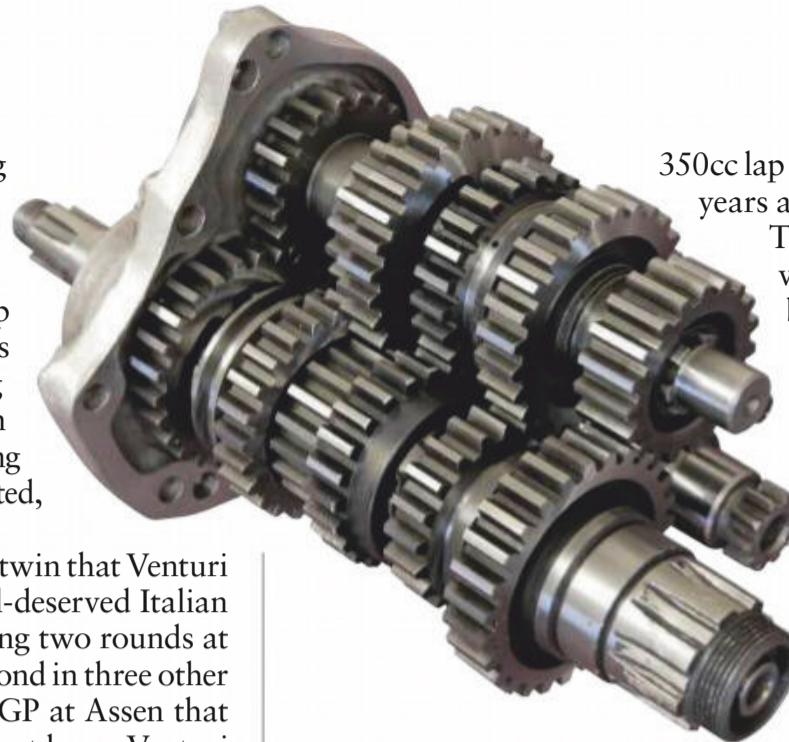
However, considering that Gilera's four-cylinder gave a genuine 67bhp, this was surely an optimistic PR figure, and according to dyno readings which Lino Tonti kept in his possession, the true figure was 62bhp, at the same revs!

Finally, during the course of 1964, Tonti obtained the

resources to do the job properly, creating a similar-format full 498cc engine measuring 73 x 59.5mm, with 20mm wider and more robust crankcases. The 500 twin was claimed to deliver 70bhp at the gearbox at 10,200rpm, as well as substantial extra torque aimed at redressing the acceleration handicap it suffered from against MV's four. But with money running short, development took longer than expected, and it was never raced.

Instead, it was with the 454cc stretch-twin that Venturi defeated the MV Agustas to win a well-deserved Italian championship, after winning the opening two rounds at Modena and Riccione, and finishing second in three other rounds. However, it was in the Dutch GP at Assen that year that Bianchi arguably had their finest hour, Venturi finishing second behind Mike Hailwood's MV in the 500 race, and third behind Hailwood and winner Jim Redman's Honda in the 350.

In what was to be the works Bianchi team's final GP race at Monza, Venturi teamed up with Alberto Pagani for the 500cc race, in which he was running third before his rear suspension collapsed, but soldiered on to finish tenth while Pagani retired with a vibrating engine. But in the 350cc race Venturi rode like a man inspired, leading Redman's Honda four for several laps before being forced to retire with ignition trouble, after setting a new outright



ABOVE: Tonti's Bianchi racer was the first to use a cassette gearbox. The six-speed gear cluster could be easily removed as a complete assembly

350cc lap record at 117mph, which lasted for many years and well into the two-stroke era.

The dohc Bianchi engines with separate vertical cylinders featured a robust four-bearing built-up roller-bearing crankshaft carrying conrods machined from solid steel billet, with H-section reinforcement. The 360° crank (the same two-up piston format as on British twins) differed from Paton parallel twins which employed a one-up/one-down 180° layout, aimed at reducing vibration, and theoretically allowing higher revs.

The Bianchi crankshaft featured full-circle flywheels, with a secondary layshaft positioned behind it and driven at half engine speed off the centre

of the crank which, in turn, drove the twin-spark ignition and oil pump. This auxiliary shaft also drove the inlet camshafts via a train of gears enclosed in a casing between the cylinders, then the exhaust cams via two more gears running across the top of the separate cylinder heads.

Although Tonti actually designed a desmodromic cylinder head for Bianchi's 350 (Mondial had already tested such an engine, but abandoned it when its progenitor Fabio Taglioni left for Ducati in 1954), this was never used owing to a lack of resources to develop it. So the two-valves-per-cylinder (a 43.5mm inlet on the 454cc version, and 37mm exhaust, with the 350's measuring 39/35mm respectively) each featured a pair of hairpin springs. Tonti said he chose these over coil springs for their lighter weight, greater reliability at higher revs by the standards of the era, and the fact that shorter rockers were needed for their operation.

The valves were positioned in the hemispherical combustion chamber at an included angle of 78° (relatively advanced for the time, when Taglioni's Ducati racers for example had a 90° valve angle) accommodated by deep inserts in the full-skirted Asso forged pistons running in cast iron liners. The compression ratio was a pretty low 9.8:1 (10:1 on the 350), perhaps reflecting the quality

'TONTI INTENDED HIS 250 TWIN TO BE STRETCHED TO 350 AND 500 CLASSES'

BELOW: The 454cc version of Tonti's Bianchi twin was the last one to be raced before the company's demise





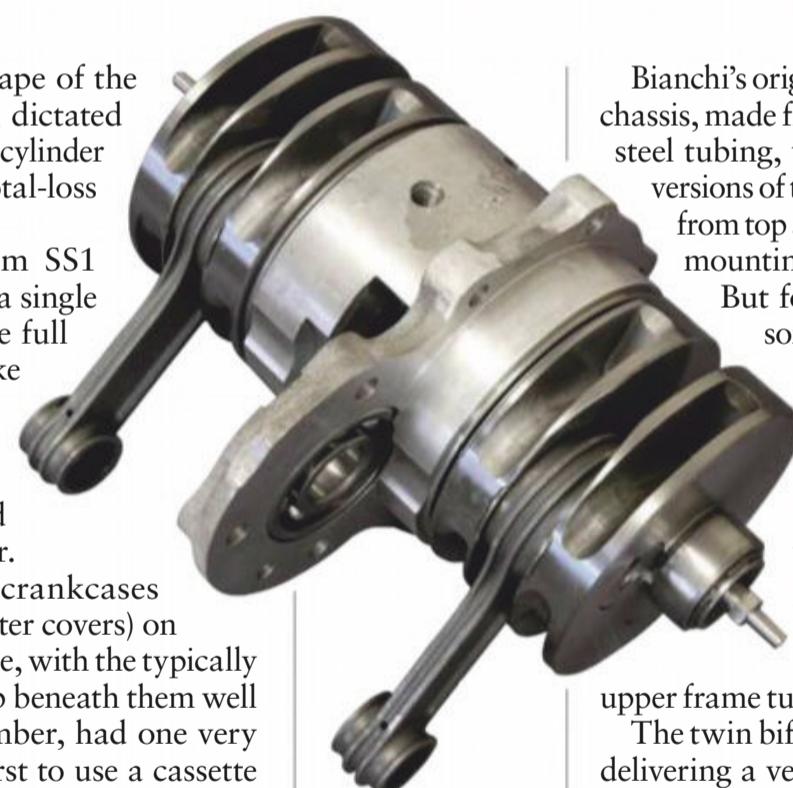
Bianchi race bikes were campaigned up to two years after the firm went bust. Silvio Grassetti (23, Bianchi 500) leads Remo Venturi (36, Gilera 500 four) at Cesenatico, Italy in 1966

of fuel available at the time. The shape of the pistons, with high flattened crowns, dictated dual ignition with two 12mm plugs per cylinder and four Bosch coils, powered by a total-loss 12-volt battery.

Carburation was by twin 35mm SS1 Dell'Ortos (32mm on the 350), with a single central remote float chamber. On the full 498cc version these were elliptical-choke 38mm items specially made for Bianchi. A four-carb version of the engine was also tried, but never raced. Tonti was developing a four-valve cylinder head design when the company went under.

The vertically-split aluminium crankcases (magnesium was used only for the outer covers) on what was effectively a dry-sump engine, with the typically Italian long, finned, magnesium sump beneath them well separated from the crankshaft chamber, had one very advanced feature. Bianchi was the first to use a cassette gearbox, which could be extracted complete from the left side without removing the engine from the frame, in order to change internal ratios on the six-speed transmission. A seven-speeder was experimented with, but never raced.

'TONTI WAS DEVELOPING A FOUR-VALVE HEAD WHEN BIANCHI WENT UNDER'



ABOVE: The chunky alloy housing for the inner main bearings is fixed rigidly to the crankcase to avoid vibration and permit high revs

Bianchi's original Norton Featherbed-style double-cradle chassis, made from relatively small-diameter chrome-moly steel tubing, was relatively conventional on the earlier versions of the bikes, save for twin bracing tubes running from top and bottom of the steering head to a common mounting point low down in front of the crankcase.

But for the 1964 season this was replaced by something much more unusual, which allowed Venturi to beat the MV fours to win the Italian title on his 454cc Bianchi twin. Christened the 'Bikini Frame' by Italian fans – for whom the recent arrival of the two-piece swimsuit on the country's beaches was hard to forget! – this bolted-up two-piece open-cradle frame which used the engine as a fully-stressed chassis component was literally hinged in the middle of the upper frame tubes, making removing the engine very easy.

The twin bifurcated downtubes were more substantial, delivering a very stiff front-end package, but this design also featured a much longer swingarm, which helped improve traction – and thus acceleration – as well as delivering a more forward weight bias. Together with a reduced frontal area, thanks to the lower overall build and more aerodynamic riding position, these were all factors which later became commonplace in GP chassis design, which Tonti was a leader in recognising.

Arces forks, specially developed for Bianchi, were originally fitted to the different-capacity Bicilindrica racers, before being replaced by the ubiquitous 35mm Cerianis, set at a 28° rake. Brakes on the 350/500 were Bianchi's own design, made for them by Grimeca. Both were 230mm magnesium drums with their distinctive ribbing for extra strength, but with the front a doubled-up four-leading-shoe version of the rear two-leading-shoe drum. From the very beginning the short-wheelbase (1330mm) bike was designed to run

on the then-new 18in wheels, in turn contributing to a low, compact package which Tonti intended should have quick steering and a low frontal area, to make the most of the available horsepower when competing against the MV and Honda fours.

At 132kg dry in 500cc form (128kg for the 250/350), the Bianchi twin was now lighter than even the Manx Norton and Matchless G50 singles it was most frequently racing against, while also weighing considerably less than the Honda and MV Agusta (and later Benelli) fours.

The bold battle against the insurmountable financial odds ended in the and inevitable outcome – Bianchi filed for bankruptcy. Although an abortive attempt was made to nationalise the company under the IRI umbrella – as would later happen with Ducati and MV Agusta – the state-owned option never took off.

Instead, the Bianchi name was sold to Piaggio, which shut down the motorcycle division but continues to this day to manufacture and race Bianchi bicycles very successfully. Ironically, in 1969 Piaggio also acquired Bianchi's neighbouring rivals, Gilera.

Back in 1964, the liquidator was obliged to sell off Bianchi's remaining assets – and that included the GP bikes. Venturi, who was owed his entire 1964 racing salary and expenses, was unable to persuade the suits to give him any of the bikes in lieu of what was due to him. To add insult to injury, the fact that he'd been bankrolling the team's entire race season out of his own pocket meant he didn't have the funds to buy any of the bikes for himself!

However, Grassetti reappeared on the scene and bought a 350 Bianchi with his personal sponsor's money, racing it successfully in Italy for two more seasons (including a second and a fourth in the 1965/66 Italian GPs respectively),

while a 454cc bike went to the glove-maker gentleman Grand Prix rider Gianni Perrone.

Tonti was allowed by the liquidator to take the other unraced, full 500cc prototype engine and sufficient parts to build a complete bike. It was eventually sold to a collector near Venice who assembled the bike and, in 2003, brought it to an historic event at Misano for Venturi to ride.

"I loved racing for Bianchi," said Venturi. "Every single thing I ever asked for was immediately done – quite the opposite of MV Agusta, where you were supposed to ride the bike exactly as they gave it to you and consider yourself fortunate to be allowed to do so! Bianchi was completely different, and it's just a shame that they were always so short of money, because Ing Tonti created a very fine-handling motorcycle which only lacked acceleration against the MV fours. But if we could only have had the full 500cc version, I honestly believe it would have allowed us to be contenders for the 500cc World Championship."

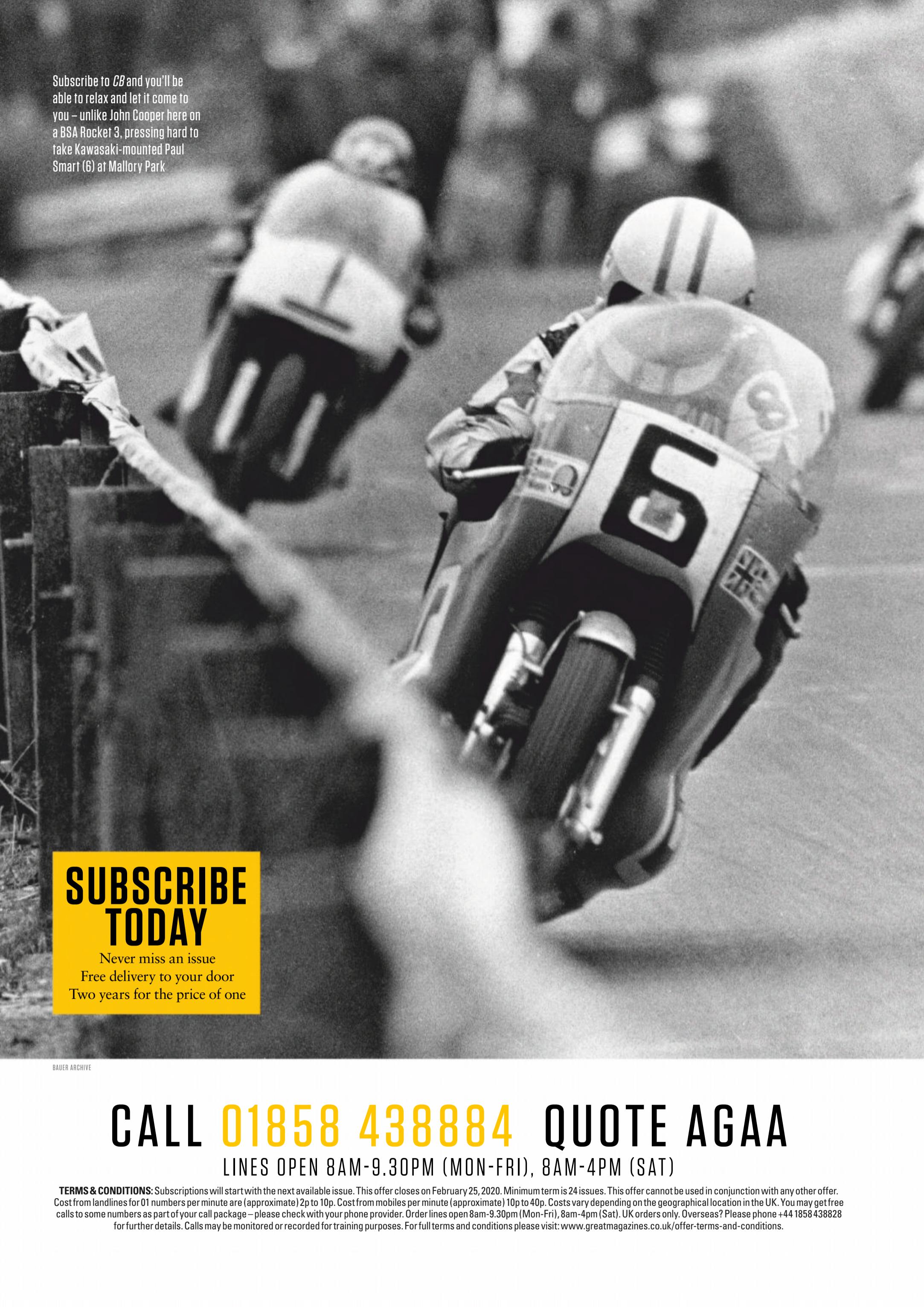
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BELOW: The 498cc prototype (which can be seen at the Sammy Miller Museum), stripped down to show the ground-breaking 'Bikini Frame'





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Recently I started the engine of my current project (a 1920s 1000cc BSA) to be tidied up. The rocker box had been treated over with black paint. The cylinder head was covered in the black baked-on oil of gunk. The cast iron cylinder was slightly rusted, but the front tube was clogged with solid paint & gunk. However, my beloved 1961 Cilter had earlier shown me the benefits of the cleaning of his rocker box & how well he was cleaned with a combination of paint & gunk.

Dear Elmore Masterton

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Rick accepted an invite from a man with his own quarry to come and have a play in it. Wouldn't you?

RICK'S PATCH

A deep (and dirty) midwinter

After a chance encounter, Rick enjoys a break from the workshop to let rip off-road

I love Christmas. Well, not tinsel and crackers, I mean the chance to get on in the workshop without interruptions. Trouble is, this means I usually miss out on any midwinter fun – but not this year. Earlier in December, I bumped into Graham Marchant at a Sidcup Club trial, and he said: “We have a fun day at a quarry near you on the 28th, if you fancy it. You know, have a ride about – there’s a barbecue, hot drinks... come along!” Now that sounded tempting – and my buddy Will Coleman was up for it as well, so that was decided.

I set off on my 500cc TriBSA, with Will on his dad’s Yamaha XT500 (having promised not to dent



WHO IS RICK?

Rick Parkington has been riding and fixing classic bikes for decades. He lives and fettles in a fully toolled up shed in his back garden.

the tank!). We didn’t know quite what to expect but to say it surpassed our hopes doesn’t quite get it. Trials hero Johnny Giles and my old friend (and boss) Paul Smart were there, along with a couple of dozen riders and machines of all ages.

The quarry is part of Graham’s family construction business and he opens it occasionally to invited guests, with friends helping to clear the site and man the barbecue. All you need is a helmet and boots, and entry is free – but given what you’re getting, it seemed appropriate to put notes in the Air Ambulance donation box rather than loose change...

This was the most serious off-roading I’ve done on the TriBSA yet – and I was delighted with it. Will enjoyed himself, too, and I was really impressed with the XT – the big seat and indicators are deceiving.

We’ve all dreamed of having our own bit of rough ground, but it’s great to find someone like Graham who is generous enough to share it. We came back muddy, tired but blissfully happy. Thanks very much, Graham!

‘WE CAME BACK FROM THE QUARRY MUDDY AND TIRED, BUT BLISSFULLY HAPPY’

ILLUSTRATION: IAIN@1000WORDS.FI

HOW TO

Seal a Triumph oil pressure switch

These indicators are great on older Triumphs with no oil light. The button pops out when running to indicate good oil pressure. Trouble is, they usually leak; here's my cure...



2 The problem is this – sealing depends on a rubber tube small enough to fit inside the spring. It has to be a tight fit at both ends, flexible and it must be able to resist hot oil – this one wasn't...



3 I've never been able to find anything suitable. Oil pipe is too thick – but a brainwave led me to a home-brewing supplies shop, where I found 4mm x 6mm 'translucent silicone tubing'.

STEP -BY- STEP



1 These pressure indicator buttons are a particularly good idea on the unit 500/350cc engines on which weak oil pressure is a sure sign of impending disaster.



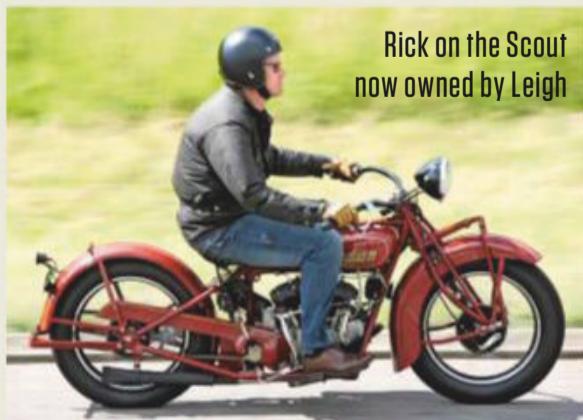
4 Silicone should be both oil- and heat-proof as well as being flexible enough to allow the all-important movement of the button. Plus at around £3 for a metre you get enough for a lifetime!

THE BIG FIX

In the heat of the moment

My mate Leigh Butler is about to fit an original magneto to his Indian 101 Scout and asked for any advice before launching straight in. It's a bike I built originally and road-tested a few years ago in CB. In the build I fitted a later 'Edison' mag; Leigh has finally located the correct 'Splitdorf', but is aware he's got a perfectly-running bike at present and could end up changing that happy situation...

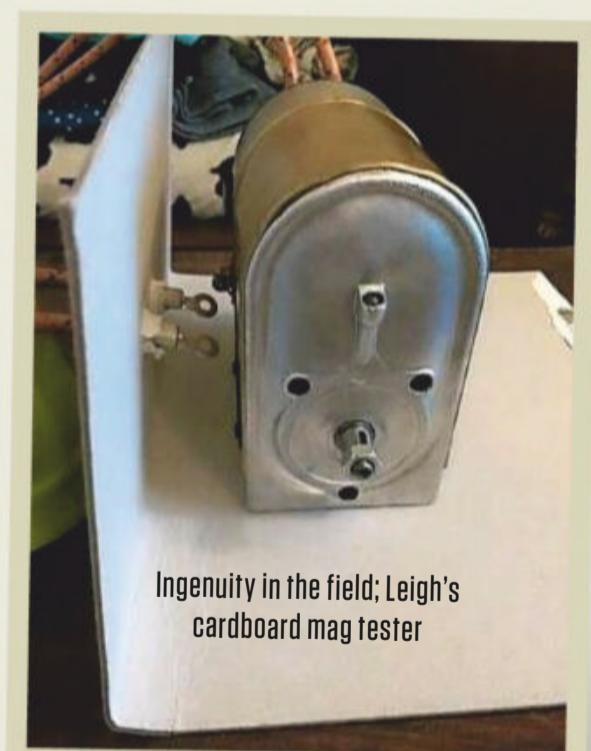
The mag has been rebuilt, but I suggested



that my first step would be to make sure it works by testing it hot. Weak magnetos always fail when at engine temperature, so rather than wait until it's on the bike and miles from home, I always warm a mag in the oven and check it before fitting.

But even then, just getting a spark across a plug gap is a bit of a feeble test; the gap is tiny and you are not working under compression as in the engine. I prefer to see it faultlessly jump a quarter-inch gap to be confident it's worth fitting, but trying to hold the lead steady at that distance is unreliable – especially when you're windy about getting a belt of high voltage.

I have an adjustable spark-gap tester to do this, but Leigh came up with his own solution – a piece of stiff card, bent at a right-angle with both leads poked through. He could then stand the mag on the card and, by shifting position, vary the gap from the leads to earth (the mag body). Next thing was how to explain how hot it should be – obviously you don't want it sizzling,



Ingenuity in the field; Leigh's cardboard mag tester

but it should be as hot as it would get fitted to the engine (ie a bit hotter than you can comfortably hold). I suggested he stick it on a domestic radiator on full heat for an hour – it's winter here, after all! Leigh tried it and the mag still sparked perfectly, so it looks like all will be well.

RICK ANSWERS YOUR QUERIES**Vintage times**

Right up my street was a query from Rick Wyatt in Minnesota concerning a Blackburne-engined 1929 Motobecane he's rebuilding for a friend. Rick asked if I could confirm the year of the engine and also how to set the valve timing, since there seem to be no timing marks.

An FG engine number prefix suggests a 1928 500cc side-valve, so that's OK; the Surrey company had several French customers in the 1920s and '30s.

There are no timing marks because the crank pinion is a taper fit and not located by a key. Instead, Blackburne timing is set by dividing the valve overlap 2:3 over top dead centre. 'Overlap' is the period around top centre on the exhaust stroke of any engine



where both valves are open at once – the inlet starts opening before the piston reaches the top and the exhaust doesn't shut until on its way back down. The idea is that inertia causes the exhaust gas to keep moving even after the piston has stopped pushing, while opening the inlet valve early takes advantage of the vacuum left behind to draw the incoming charge. Clever, but obviously you can overdo it, which is why highly-tuned engines like the Clubmans BSA Gold Star with a whacking 120° overlap are rather intractable at low speed...

Rick needs to measure the overlap in degrees using a timing disc and divide the degrees by five, setting the cam so two fifths of the overlap are before TDC. I know, it took me a while to understand it, but if the overlap was 50°, then you'd set the inlet to open 20° before TDC and the exhaust would close 30° after. More modern engines tend to bias the opening toward the inlet, but for any vintage engine where no information exists, setting TDC in the mid-point is a good starting point.

RIGHT: Amal jets have smaller threads than earlier AMAC

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LEFT: No timing
marks? No problem...

**CARB CONVERSION**

Andrew Bartleet got in touch, having read an AMAC carb item on my website (rickparkington.co.uk) to ask about converting these 1920s instruments to take later Amal main jets.

There were several carburetor makers in Britain originally, and Triumph even made their own. The Amal name refers to the 1928 'amal-gamation' of the three major manufacturers: AMAC, Brown and Barlow, and Binks, all of whom had worthy features, some of which were incorporated in the new Amal carburettor.

But they all had their own jets, and nowadays they are hard to find, so conversion to take readily-available Amal jets is a good fix. As far as the AMAC is concerned, the best solution for the lathe owner is to make a copy of the original jet holder from brass hexagon bar, reducing the size of the threaded hole from 1/4BSF to 1BA to suit Amal jets, then you are sorted ever after. But it's worth bearing in mind that jetting wasn't so fussy in those days; settings were for '500cc touring' or '500cc sports' rather than individual makes and models, so you don't usually need a complete selection of sizes.

RICK'S TOP TIPS**GETTING
HORNY**

Old horns rarely burn out – even putting 12v through a 6v unit doesn't seem to matter. But they do have points inside and the horn won't work if they're dirty. Try it – a quick clean up and you may be honking again.

**GUDGEON
GRIP**

I've had it with gudgeon pin extractors. However careful I am, they seem to slip and damage the piston. I think you'd need to make a custom mandrel for every pin instead of the domed ones supplied...



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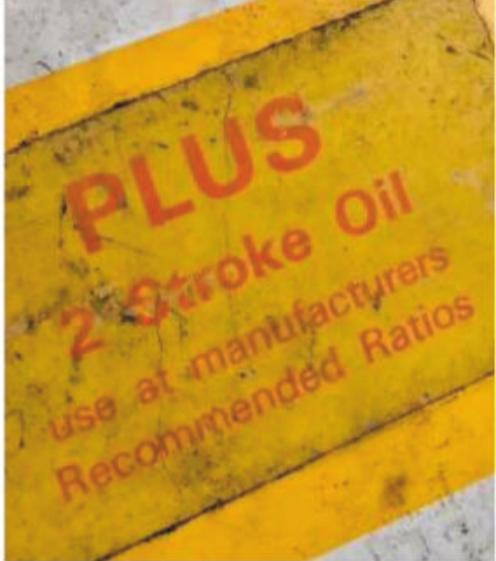
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RICK ANSWERS YOUR QUERIES

Old oils required different ratios

OIL BE BLOWED...

Kavan Crews' 1955 Francis-Barnett starts readily, but will only run for a few seconds before cutting out.

Failed crank seals in the 225cc Villiers 1H engine seemed a likely suspect, but the engine has been rebuilt by Villiers Services, who also overhauled the original Villiers carburettor. An electronic ignition conversion suggests the sparks are OK, so Kav's running out of ideas.

In cases like this where the fuelling, engine health and ignition have all been sorted but it still doesn't work, there are just two

possibilities: either one of them isn't sorted after all or it's something else altogether. Stale petrol causes problems, but the fuel was fresh. It's worth bearing in mind even new plugs can be faulty, too. And what about fuel mix? Originally Villiers specified 20:1; updating to a ratio for modern oils, say 30:1, will richen the mixture (less oil = more petrol : 1) so the carb may need adjustment. It's also worth draining the crankcase as petrol can evaporate leaving a build-up of neat oil.

Returning to ignition, it occurred to me that these motors had anti-vibration rubber bushes built into the engine mountings. Given that the ignition coil is mounted remotely from the engine, an earth connection is needed and this is included, alongside the low-tension and lighting wires, in a block connector on the crankcase. Electronic ignition usually needs a good earth, so if the system has a black box with an earth lead, this will probably need to go the crankcase not the frame.

Thinking I'd got the answer, I got back to Kav – but he said he'd reduced the oil to petrol ratio and it was now running better. Me and my big ideas... but well done for sorting it!

**'FAILED CRANK SEALS IN THE ENGINE
SEEMED LIKELY, BUT IT'S BEEN REBUILT'****CHAIN OF FOOLS**

Martin Wilkie says that a neighbour recently lost two trials bikes, stolen from a locked garage, because although chained up he'd left his angle grinder out to help cut through them. As Martin says, it's possible the insurance company may make something of this – and the lesson is not to leave useful power tools visible where they can be put to the wrong use.

It's a good point, but not always easy to deal with. I often turn off the power to the workshop when we are away, but that's not so easy if you have a freezer in the garage. Besides, the thieves obviously got into the garage by their own means and sadly cordless technology is useful to the dishonest as well as the rest of us, with battery-powered grinders available for as little as

£30. Security has always been as much a matter of luck as anything, but I always think your best defence is secrecy. Don't leave the garage door open and when you come back from a trial, get the bike off the trailer and inside as soon as you can. It used to be nice to leave the bike outside and chat with passers-by about their riding days, but nowadays this is one area where advertising doesn't pay.



Maybe a bit over the top, but you get the idea!

RICK'S FINAL WORD**The real cause of Brit bike demise?**

Arthur Farrow emailed to add a point to what I wrote in the September Fixes about noisy Triumph timing gears. He says that an ex-Meriden employee had told him that these were 'selectively assembled' at the factory, so all these years later, allowing for wear and possibly a few secondhand replacement parts, noise is quite common. Indeed, a friend of Arthur's lost the sale of his Tiger 110 owing to buyers' suspicion of the noise.

Arthur's quite right and, bear with me on this, I'd even go so far as to say that this was probably more the cause of the British bike industry's demise than the usual 'bad management and lack of investment/forward planning' arguments. Why? Well, the output of human (rather than computer) operated machinery inevitably lacks consistency. While this provides an artisan-made feel that makes old bikes refreshing compared to today's soulless transport, the downside of every bike having its own personality was that it was a lottery whether your new bike was a good 'un or a dud.



Fitters would selectively assemble the best match of minutely-varying parts, like timing gears, to achieve the smoothest running set. So while the Japanese worker reached for a part, fitted it and moved on, his British counterpart was still sifting through to find the best fit.

This was fine before World War II, when workers were poorly paid, but improved earnings made such labour-heavy methods financially unviable. The obvious answer was to invest in automated systems, but new machines are costly and automation would have resulted in unacceptable redundancies at a time when the trades unions held industry by the ball bearings. As a nation destroyed by war, Japan had no option but to build new factories with new machines – and, equally importantly, they had a burning ambition to rebuild their nation and they succeeded in that. Britain was literally stuck in the past with a demoralised workforce for whom 'victory' meant little more than years of rationing. Nothing's ever simple is it?

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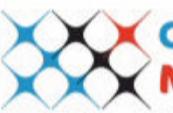


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Lewis, imagining the day
when his freshly-build
wheels turn under power...



Project Excelsior Universal

Progress on Young Lewis' bike continues...

The hub of the matter

When is a motorcycle not a motorcycle? When it doesn't have any wheels. This month Rick and Lewis rectified that with a bit of help from an old friend

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: RICK PARKINGTON

I know some restorers who won't begin reassembly until everything is laid out ready: gleaming enamel, dazzling chrome, polished aluminium, serrated ranks of nuts and bolts... Call me immature, but I can't be that disciplined. I like the regular hits of excitement I get from reaching each stage of completeness. Fitting the forks and – crucially – the handlebars; putting the rebuilt engine back into the frame...

But surely the big one is the wheels. The clue is in the word – 'motor-cycle', an engine on wheels. Fitting the wheels is the point at which, for me, any rebuild really turns the corner. The only trouble with the Excelsior was that we didn't have any wheels. Well, we did – but as it arrived, the rear rim was rusted through and the front was missing altogether.

It would have been easier if we'd had both, however rotted. Rusty parts may look fit for the skip, but they contain much useful information. Although it was in desperate condition, the rear rim revealed

width and diameter as well as the spoke angles and lengths – information we'd have to work out for ourselves with the front.

The hubs themselves were in pretty good condition. We washed and greased the rear hub ball races and fitted new balls to the cycle-style cup-and-cone front hub. It isn't easy to find replacement cups and cones, and in cases where these are past saving the easiest solution is to have the hub machined to take ball races, remembering to fit an accurately-sized spacer between to support the inner races.

I was Lewis's age – 17 – when I met former 50cc racer Maurice Thomas. Back then he was the 'Mol' of Molray Engineering in Kent, building wheels while business partner Ray Palmer straightened frames and forks (um, some of them mine!)

'FITTING THE WHEELS TURNS THE CORNER'

That company is now Maidstone Motoliner, run by Ray's son Tommy and assisted by Maurice's grandson George, so you might say it's a family affair.

Maurice (01622 202536) sold me the spokes for my first wheel build, which was also for an Excelsior front wheel. He's still wheel-building today, so it seemed right to ask him to teach Lewis how it's done.

The front wheel build was complicated by having no spoke samples. I already had a rim, so I decided to sort that one out myself. Lewis had bought the Ensign tyres ready; back in my Excelsior days I had to rely on finding old stock, as narrow 19s were not available in the 1980s, but the Ensign range has usefully filled a lot of gaps. I can see Lewis is getting itchy about having never actually ridden a bike, so that's going to have to be addressed soon – but we had a load more good luck this month. Not only was I able to salvage the missing bit for Lewis' speedo drive from a scrap hub, Rudge owner Andy Carlile very generously donated £100. Thanks very much, Andy! ▶

MAURICE'S SPECIAL TOOLS



DRAPER SPOKE KEY SET

Maurice likes this Draper spoke key set, although he does find the serrated handle uncomfortable. He has made himself a plain alloy one but sleeving with heatshrink could be an option.



HOME-MADE WHEEL JIG

Maurice built this sturdy wheel jig using various scrap lorry parts. Particularly ingenious is a spring-loaded roller run-out indicator (at the top) to measure deflection when truing.



HOME-MADE BUILDING STAND

An old swivelling chair base that's been extended to waist height makes a good horizontal building stand. Maurice has also turned up some mandrels to accept different spindle sizes.



HOME-MADE OFFSET GUIDE

This is a simple alloy strip with an adjustable bolt indicator – it makes a useful easy guide for setting the offset of a rim, measured off a suitable flat surface such as the brake drum.



HOME-MADE TEMPLATE

This is a spoke-angle template for another wheel. The angles are traced from the old wheel before stripping. The template gives the correct angle to drill holes in a blank rim.

PROJECT EXCELSIOR



1 A board with a drilled hole supports the hub while Lewis fits the first spokes. Maurice says full-width hubs are easier to start on, as the spokes are all the same length.



2 On a wheel like this, where the brake plate sits snugly over the spoke flange, all spokes have to go in from the outside. More commonly they alternate: internal/external.



3 Rim holes go four ways: left, right, back, forward. On half-width hubs, angles should differ slightly side to side. Angles are clarified by pushing a nipple through the hole.



4 Internal spokes go in first, as they cross beneath externals. Find a hole that points the right way and fit the spoke, with each subsequent one in the fourth hole along.



5 Next, Maurice advised fitting a couple of opposite-side spokes, to check we're not a hole out. If we were, we'd find half the other-side spokes are too long and half too short.



6 Second run: keyhole fit on the other side makes building easy. Usually you have to fit both sides' internals first; they can't pass through the external spokes once fitted.



7 Spoke nipples lightly tightened, flip the wheel over. 'Keyholes' enable the spoke head to be hooked in place instead of feeding the long end through and into place.



9

Maurice showed Lewis how to true eccentricity and runout. Spinning the wheel and tweaking spokes is pleasant, but takes time. Maurice's best wheel-build time is 50 minutes.



8 Lewis finished assembly, and the wheel went in the truing jig. First job was to check the offset. The rim centre should be in line with the grease nipple in the wheel hub.



10 That's the easy one done! Back home, I'm stuck with a rim and a hub, and will have to work out the spoke lengths and offset dimensions for myself.



11 'Offset' means the rim is not central to the spoke flanges. Fitting the hub into the forks will reveal a centre point – here, it's marked by the grease nipple.



12 Having measured from nipple to bench surface, pack the rim centre to the same height and, using radial measurements, centralise the rim to the hub.



13

Next thing is to work out the spoke pattern by inserting some spokes and seeing where they land on the hub; this first attempt looks quite convincing...



14 ... but old photos say otherwise; this is more like it. The spoke angle is significantly different on a half-width hub and I had the rim wrong side up.



15 Next thing to check is centrality. A line from the rim hole, midway between my sample spokes, to the axle bisects the cross point of the spokes.



16 With all that set up, I can measure how much longer my 'sample spokes' would need to be to fit, then I can calculate the length of the spokes I need.



17 After cutting the spokes to length, I rolled the threads on my Cyclo thread roller – it's not for stainless spokes, they're too hard and damage the dies



18 After that, it was a straightforward build. I didn't time this one from start to finish, but I must admit I didn't beat Maurice's 50 minutes record!



19 I found this old Norton front hub rotting on a friend's junk pile. The alloy speedo drive was certainly rotten – but had the gears inside survived?



22 We still lacked ignition. Next job was to clean up the original points on an oilstone; they were a bit 'weather beaten', but still perfectly useable.



25 ... then line up arrow on flywheel with notch on backplate and tighten flywheel onto its taper. No special tools, no dial gauges – job done!



20 Happy day! I hate cutting things up; the alloy really was past saving, but it looks like the internals just might live on in another bike...



23 With clean points, Lewis could fit the magneto backplate. Bad things happen if this comes loose and hits the flywheel, so locking fluid on the screws.



21 Result! Mixing and matching parts, I managed to fix not only Lewis' drive box, but two of mine using the Norton bits; that's a worthy sacrifice I'd say!



24 Villiers ignition timing is easy. The points cam is in centre boss of the flywheel so begin by setting the crank position. The notch goes at 12 o'clock...



26 With wheels and a great spark, we're getting close to fire-up! I dragged out my Excelsior (which started second kick). It's getting time Lew learned to ride a motorcycle!

NEXT MONTH

Now we have wheels, the next thing will be fitting up mudguards. Don't tell him, but I'm also thinking about teaching him to ride on my Excelsior: 2.8bhp, two gears, a seat barely two feet off the ground – it's perfect. And it will make his 125 feel like a rocket! See you then...



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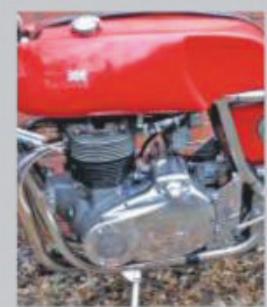
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I Cleenz Macheenz

Heard the one about the guy who liked a company so much, he bought it? That's the story behind this metal-cleaning company that serves classic bike restoration enthusiasts

PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY MARGERUM

When Peter Allan quit his high-flying job as a City commodity broker, he could easily have sat back in retirement and played with his collection of classic motorcycles. But when metal cleaning firm I Cleenz Macheenz came up for grabs, he stumped up the cash to buy it and set about regenerating the business.

“I Cleenz was involved at some point during all of my pre-unit Triumph restoration projects, so I knew the business quite well from a customer’s point of view. After 33 years of working in the City, I loved the old-school feel of the place, a business where computer technology doesn’t exist, apart from in the accounting processes. I’d quit the City and was looking to keep busy in retirement so when it came up for sale I decided to buy it.

“The initial aim was to build it up and at some point hand the reigns over to my son, but he decided to concentrate on his digital business. So now I’ve decided to hand it over to Kyane Hinds, who has worked here alongside George Smith, the previous owner, for seven years. It will be his business. We all work very well as a team; George has taught Kyane everything about the metal cleaning processes, so my role is to help him with the business side of things and spend a couple days a week mentoring him.”

I Cleenz Macheenz offers a comprehensive range of specialist metal cleaning processes which include:

glass bead blasting, grit blasting, vapour blasting and ultrasonic cleaning for carburettors.

Peter says: “We grit blast parts to prepare them for paint, vapour blast aluminium and bead blast magnesium cases to restore them to the original factory finish. We do such a wide range of work; anything from stripping old office chairs to prepare for paint to blasting and preparing body panels for paint for an Italian supercar specialist. We work with a 1970s Porsche specialist – 911 and 912 engines are a speciality for us. We’ve done countless Ford Crossflow and Pinto blocks for a well-known historic Ford engineering company.

“We clean all sorts of motorcycle engine parts including bronze heads for Vincents. We work with engineering companies, degreasing engine components so they can work on clean parts. And as well as cleaning up classic motorcycle frames we also have several vintage BMX restorers who come to us to have frames stripped which they then repaint and finish with new graphics. I didn’t realise the vintage BMX market was so buoyant.

“We work with a jeweller who asks us to create a different finish to the metal they work with and we blast clear acrylics to give them an opaque finish for artists. We work with wood, too.

“And if there are any metal repairs needed by a client, we get that done for us by Dick Smith at the Baron’s Speed Shop. We clean and blast around the area to be



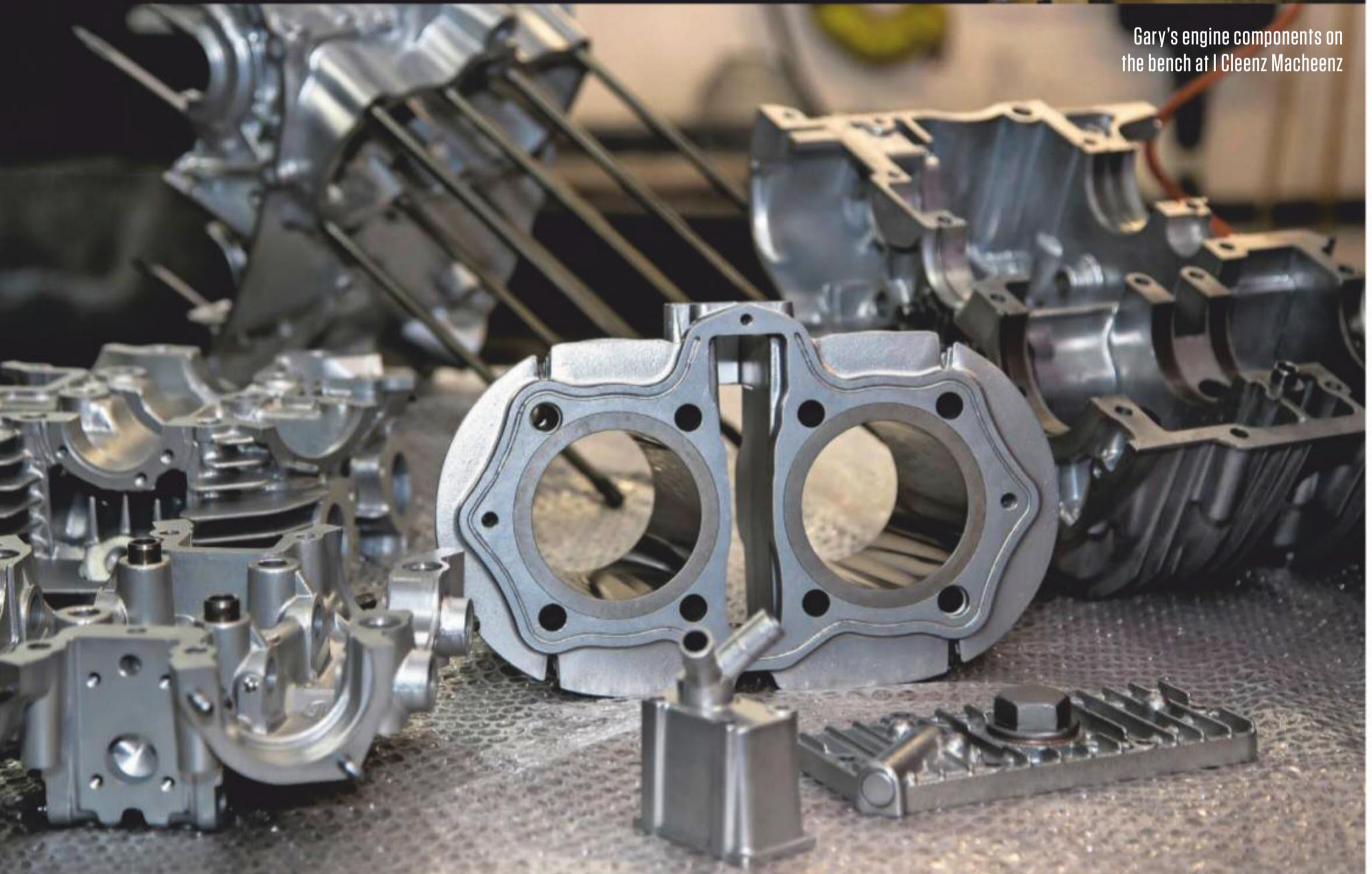
Ex-City broker Peter Allan (left) and Kyane Hinds (right)



This engine will get a degrease in solvent before work commences



Kyane loading up Editor Gary Pinchin's Yamaha XS650 barrels into the vapour blaster



Gary's engine components on the bench at I Cleenz Macheenz

repaired, then when it comes back to us repaired, we can use our various processes to match the repair to the surrounding metal as best as possible."

Vapour blasting

This cleaning process uses smooth glass beads in a powerful jet of hot water to restore aluminium components back to factory condition without losing any of the factory casting marks or the metal surface texture of the original casting.

Parts are masked up to protect gasket faces, bearing surfaces and studs and are then gently cleaned with a dry blast of aluminium oxide first. The masking tape is then removed and the components are placed into the cabinet and vapour blasted.

The component is then thoroughly pressure steam cleaned to ensure there are no beads left that might contaminate the component, then dried with compressed air and air-dried with warm air. Before delivery back to the customer, the item is blown off again with compressed air and all blind holes are blown out using flexible tube attachments.

The process leaves a slightly burnished finish on iron, steel or high-tensile alloy castings. Softer alloys have a more satin appearance. Polishing is available if required. Protection after blasting is provided by ACF-50, which I Cleenz both uses and sells. This product is aircraft certified and the best around for corrosion protection.

Grit Blasting

Grit blasting uses compressed air to blast certain types of media or shot at an item to remove any paint, corrosion, scale or other surface contaminants and leave an even finish on steel and iron parts such as frames, tanks and panels. Grit blasting is normally followed by another process such as vapour blasting.

The process begins by ensuring the component is completely clean, using a degreaser, then it's pressure washed to ensure it is free of loose dirt or grease prior to blasting. This can be a combination of a chemical dip and steam clean, or simply a steam clean. Particular attention is paid to oilways and hidden passages. Once chemically clean they are blown through with compressed air, then any areas of the part that need to be protected from the blast media – threaded screw holes, for example – are masked or plugged.

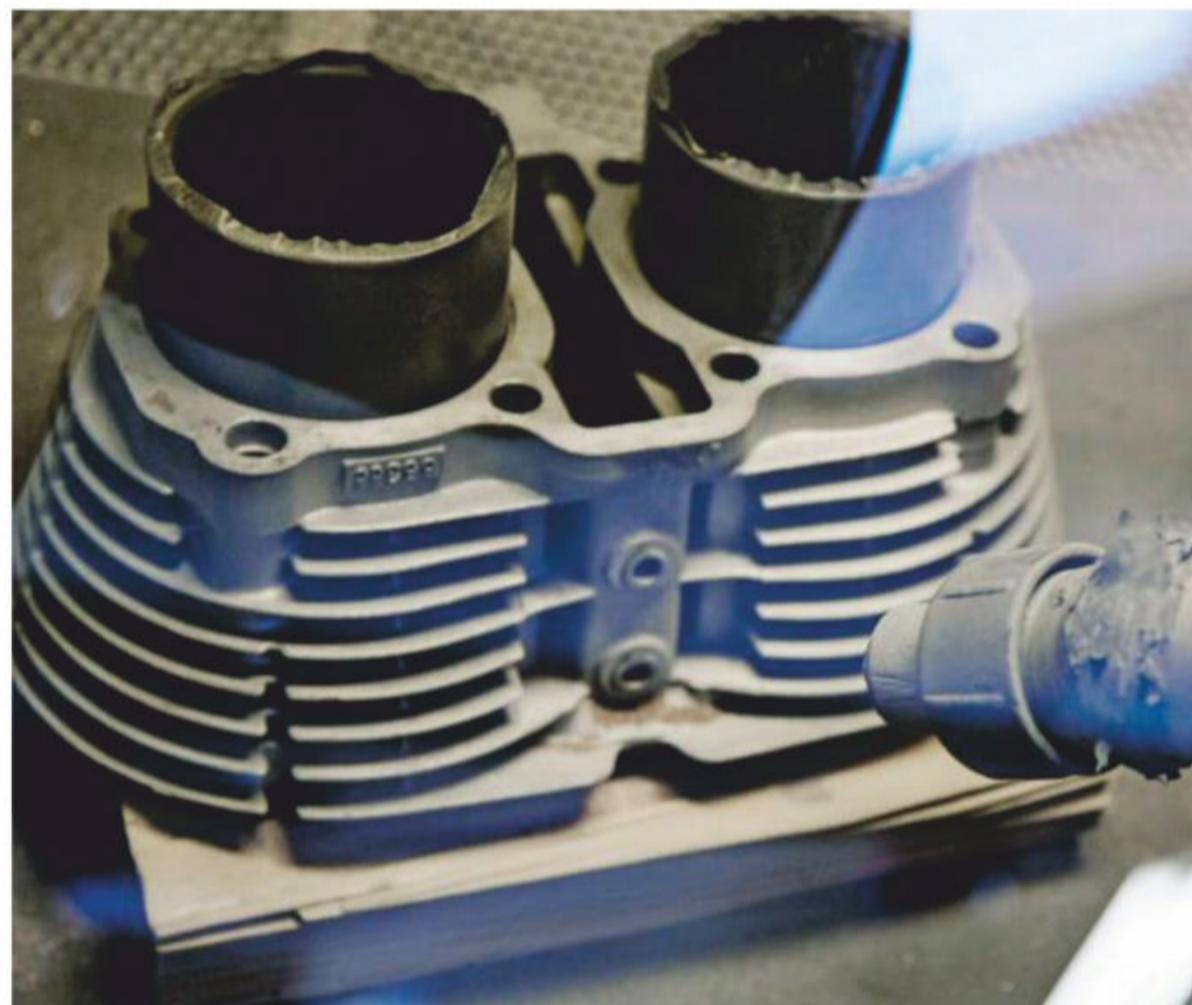
Depending on the size of what is being blasted, and how delicate it is, I Cleenz have the option of using either a blast cabinet or the blast room – and what blasting media to use. Steel grit is used in the blast room, aluminium oxide in the cabinet. Once it's been blasted the part is blown off with a compressed air gun.

Ultra-sonic washing

I Cleenz has an 80-litre tank which is more effective in clearing gum and blockages in carburettors than smaller bench-top units. The process does not improve the carburettor's external appearance, but I Cleenz can perform delicate glass bead blasting and vapour Blasting if required. Carbs need to be sent fully stripped of all components – with the exception of any butterfly valves which may be difficult to remove.

Carbs are first soaked in a chemical solvent to loosen the built-up gum or scale. If there are plastic parts in the carb body, then it's all steam cleaned instead.

The chemical soak has the added benefit of letting the solvent run through all the innermost recesses of the carb for effective cleaning. Then comes the ultrasonic wash. I Cleenz only clean one or two carbs at a time to



ABOVE: Barrels being vapour blasted after being masked up

RIGHT: Old gasket goo being removed

BELLOW: Engine cover in the process of being restored to factory finish





Gasket faces and bearing surfaces are masked up



Dental tools are used for detail cleaning work



Compressed air is used to blow out oilways and blind holes, using flexible tube attachments

maximise effectiveness, with smaller parts like jets washed inside special netting to allow effective cleaning.

The carb body, airways and passages are thoroughly washed with water, making sure all airways and passages are targeted. After a thorough rinse the carb is pressure washed then dried using compressed air.

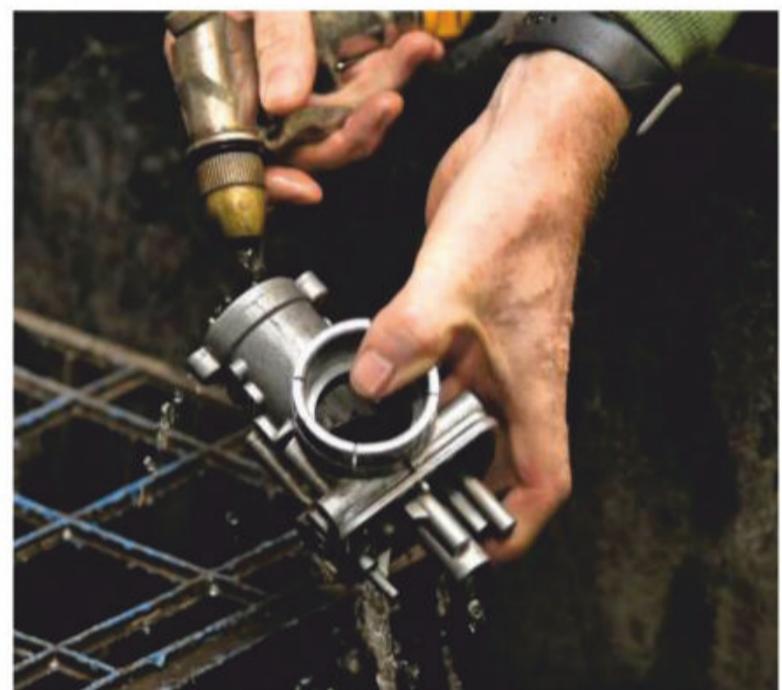
Other services

I Cleenz is a one-stop shop for restoration businesses and enthusiasts alike. There's a 'pressure wash only' option for customers who are just looking to have dirty engine cases and sumps cleaned of loose dirt, grease, oil, etc but don't need the shot or vapour blasting service.

They can offer chemical paint stripping for clients wanting a more gentle finish to their parts, which includes pressure washing before applying an aggressive solvent to remove paint. The component is then pressure washed and cleaned of all paint stripper.

I Cleenz also offers a range of affiliate services including: engineering repairs and cylinder head renovation services through SRS Engineering; welding, sheet metal repairs via Baron's Speed Shop; powder coating via Primus Quality Coatings; chrome plating by Douglas Metal Finishing; gold, zinc and other types of plating through Fox Plating; and polishing by Nick Morley (The Metal Polisher). 

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A carburetor body getting an ultrasonic wash



Once given the I Cleenz treatment, components look factory fresh

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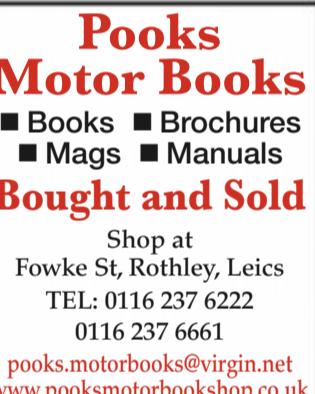


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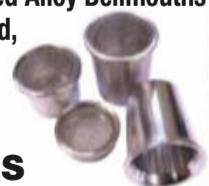
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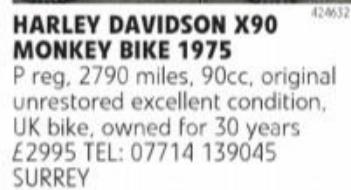
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Moto Guzzi 750 Nevada, 2003
MV Agusta 350GT, 1979

MV Agusta 350B, 1974
Aermacchi 250, 1961
Ducati Sport 1000S, 2007
Ducati MHR, 1983
Ducati 500 Pantah, 1980

Ghezzi-Brian SuperTwin, 2002
Gilera Saturno 500, 1954
Laverda Jota, 1977
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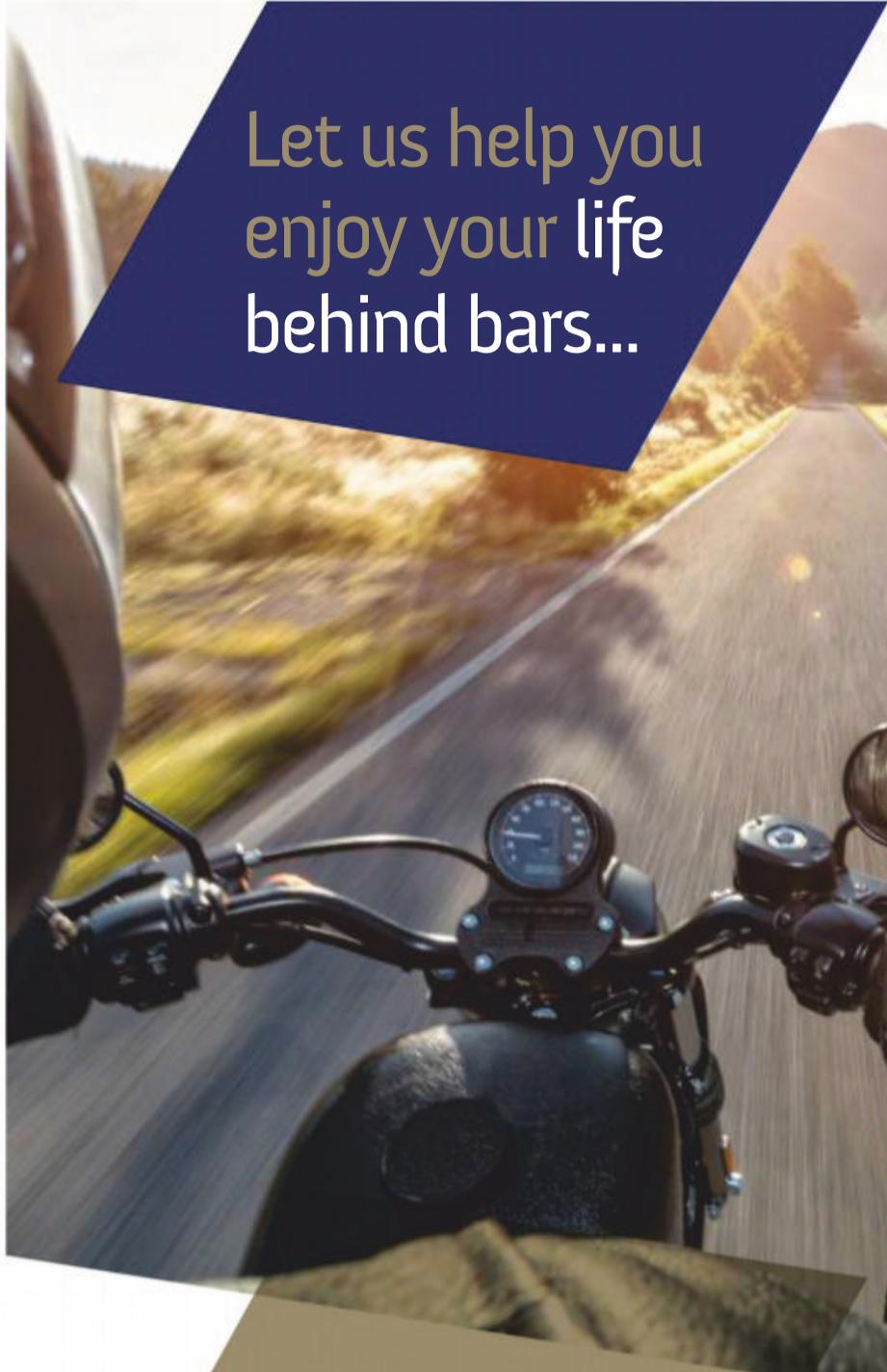
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Vintage challenge

Taking the plunge into the world of vintage bikes doesn't have to cost the earth

1929 AJS M5
£6000



If you've ever yearned to sample the delights of vintage motorcycling, maybe now's the time to scratch that itch. Pre-1931 bikes might be very different to the more familiar post-war classics, but they have a charm all of their own. As CB's Rick Parkington has proved, keeping a vintage bike in good, rideable fettle often takes no more than time, effort – and sometimes a little ingenuity. But it's not rocket science. And it is rewarding.

If you thought owning a Banbury Run-eligible bike was only for the well-heeled, think again. This 350cc 1929 AJS M5, on sale at Andy Tiernan's Framlingham emporium (andybuysbikes.com) for £6000, proves otherwise. Launched in 1929, the M5 was AJS's

ABOVE: More riders are enjoying the involvement of vintage bikes like this
BELOW: Unthreatening 350cc side-valve



'standard sporting' side-valve model and this example looks like a decent prospect for a prospective first-time vintage motorcycle owner.

It's got most of what you'd expect of a vintage machine – a three-speed gearbox with hand change, girder forks, a low, sprung saddle and a commendably svelte weight of just 253lb (114kg). Throw in an unintimidating 349cc side-valve engine and you've got the ideal machine to master the art of vintage riding. But it's got more than you might expect, too. As standard, the £45 M5 came without lights or a speedometer back in 1929, but this one has the benefit of both.

Andy says the bike came to him from the estate of a retired engineer from Cambridgeshire, who had undertaken a considerable amount

of work on it prior to his death, and some invoices and receipts relating to that are with the bike. Looking largely original (aside from a non-standard exhaust and silencer) and complete, the matching-numbers bike will still require a thorough checking over before returning to the road. But, following a four-mile road test, the Tiernan workshop found it started readily from hot or cold, despite the timing being a little retarded, the brakes worked reasonably well and all gears selected successfully with good clutch operation. That doesn't sound too bad a starting point.

A bike like this can open the door to a whole host of new experiences – like the Banbury Run, for a start. There's good reason for it being oversubscribed most years, but there are plenty of other vintage-only runs throughout the year – and a growing band of dedicated (and often surprisingly youthful) new vintage fans. If you need a new challenge, maybe a vintage machine like this could be what you need.



LEFT: A matching-numbers machine, always a benefit come selling time

FAR LEFT: A brief road test proved the engine started readily, but the bike needs some further recommissioning

In the market for vintage value?

If you don't fancy the AJS, maybe one of these would suit you better...



Mid-'20s Favor 250cc
£3250

This delightful French lightweight represents an ideal, affordable introduction to vintage motorcycling. UK registered, in good running order.

andybuysbikes.com



1927 Triumph Model N 500cc
£8750

Ready to tackle the Banbury Run in style is this elegant side-valve Triumph. In fine condition and with some known history.

andybuysbikes.com



1930 Velocette GTP 250cc
£4950

Previously displayed in a museum before being bought by its previous owner seven years ago. Looks complete and original, though hasn't run for some time.

wesellclassicbikes.co.uk



Circa 1929 Sunbeam Model 9
£7995

This unrestored but largely complete example starts and rides well. Ride or restore? Decisions, decisions...

pembrokeshireclassics.com

RARITY

1982 OSSA COPA FORMULA 3

Ossa's racer on the road is a genuine pocket rocket



If you fancy a bit of giant-killing this summer, this might be just the thing for you. The 250cc Spanish stroker makes a claimed 34bhp and its light weight and sharp handling mean it should be capable of running down some big-bore rivals on the right roads. Maybe there is a substitute for cubes after all...

Ossa had developed a sports version of their 250 road bike – the 250 Turismo – to contest a single-make race series they promoted in conjunction with *Motociclismo*

'AROUND 600 OF THESE BIKES WERE BUILT BETWEEN 1981-85'

magazine in Spain in 1976/77. With parts raided from the motocross department's racks, the bike proved a success, and for 1977 upgraded T (Turismo) and T Copa models were introduced. The arrival of the Formula 3 class (up to 250cc two-strokes, up to 400cc four-strokes) in 1981 prompted a new, improved, model – the Copa Formula 3.

Around 600 of these race bikes on the road were built between 1981 and 1985 (along with kits to upgrade the earlier Copa to F3 spec). This is one of them. It's for sale at Spinning Wheel Classics (spinningwheelclassiccars.com) for £5950. Imported from Spain in 2016, it is in immaculate condition, with just 3312km on the clock, fitted with a full race exhaust (a factory-supplied road pipe comes with it) and 35mm Bing carb.

DEALER EXPERT



ANTHONY GODIN GODIN SPORTING CARS AND MOTORCYCLES LTD

'The trade works in cycles, so I don't get too down when things get a little quiet'

This year has been a little quieter than many in the classic bike trade would have liked, probably for a variety of reasons. But I've always said if I wanted to make a fortune, I probably wouldn't have got into the business in the first place. The vast majority of people who work in the bike trade do it because they're passionate about bikes.

I realise I'm lucky. I worked in retail and auctions before setting up on my own, and I've been around long enough to see – and enjoy – the trade in good times and bad. When I started trading bikes, I could buy a Triumph T140 for less than £500. There wasn't really a market for emerging classic bikes then. They were just old bikes. Fortunately, I happened to like old bikes and I've stuck with them ever since. And I know the trade works in cycles, so I don't get too down when things get a little quiet.

In fact, when trade gets a little slower, it can be a great opportunity to reconnect with what got me into this business in the first place. I've had a couple of trips down to the west country with a few mates, and got to ride a Honda RC45 for the first time. I

also reminded myself of the joys of riding Triumph twins when I test-rode one I ended up selling a few weeks ago and enjoyed a 10-day trip to the top of the Tyrol Pass with five Brough-riding mates. I couldn't have done that if I was flat-out at work.

The Brough trip – organised by the owners' club to celebrate the centenary of the marque – was wonderful. Six of us did a 1600-mile round trip to a museum that was staging a centenary Brough display. The bikes ranged from a 1927 SS80 to my 2019 SS100 demonstrator. The route avoided motorways and centred on minor roads; it was motorcycling as it used to be – and still can be, when you ride a classic.

Maybe that's why I still love working in the classic bike trade. It still gives me a real buzz – and I still really enjoy riding old bikes. There'll always be peaks and troughs in this game. The trick is to enjoy the peaks and take advantage of the troughs.

Based in Mereworth, Kent, Anthony deals in quality classic bikes and cars. He's been in the trade for almost 30 years.
anthonygodin.co.uk

THREE BIKES THAT REMIND ANTHONY WHY HE'S STILL HOOKED ON CLASSICS...



**1966 Triumph T120 Bonneville
Sold for £11,495**

I'd forgotten just how good Triumph twins are to ride until I took this out for a spin. Great looks, great fun – a genuine all time classic.



**2019 Brough Superior SS100
£54,495**

OK, not an old bike, but an authentic modern classic, I believe. The perfect tool for a leisurely trip down to the Italian border.



**1929 Norton Model 18
£27,995**

Not a cheap classic by any means, but a rock-solid investment. You won't believe how good a vintage bike can be until you ride something like this.

Norton Commando

**Think Brit parallel twins are over-rated bad vibes merchants?
Riding a good one of these will change your mind**

WORDS: GEZ KANE PHOTOGRAPHY: BAUER ARCHIVE

Norton's Commando has earned a pretty good reputation for itself, considering it was originally intended as a stopgap model. And rightly so – it's right up there in the running for the title of 'best British parallel twin' and, with the strength in depth of the opposition from Triumph, BSA and AMC, that's no mean feat.

The problem for Norton in the late '60s was that they desperately needed a new flagship model. BSA/Triumph were already developing their triples, Honda had already released their biggest bike to date – the CB450 – in 1967 and rumours of more to come from Japan abounded. Norton had been working on a new dohc engine and prototypes were already up and running – but so, too, was time. Dennis Poore's Manganese Bronze

Holding Company owned Norton's parent company by then, and Poore was keen to revitalise the Norton brand as part of the new Norton Villiers Triumph (NVT) group, so he put together an all-star design team to come up with a new range-topper for Norton.

With time short, the team came up with the idea of using the existing 750cc Atlas engine in an innovative new frame design that would solve the problem of big-twin vibration. By mounting the swingarm direct to the engine and isolating them from the main frame loop (and hence the rider) with rubber-bushed mountings, the Isolastic system was born; the combination of all-new frame and tried-and-tested engine became the Commando.

To give the new model a more up-to-date look, the engine was tilted forward slightly in the frame.

Commando's unique Isolastic system makes handling a grin-inducing sensation



ENGINE

Generally pretty reliable – except for the infamous Combat unit that boosted power to 65bhp, which was all too much for the ageing crank, with vibration at high revs destroying the main bearings. The Combat's slotted-skirt pistons often failed prematurely, and a redesigned camshaft thrust washer was prone to breaking up. Don't go near one unless it has Superblend bearings, solid skirt pistons and the thicker head gasket that reduces compression.



ELECTRICS

Check for the usual age-related issues with connectors and switches. The electric start fitted to MkIII 850s isn't the best, but can be upgraded. Many electronic ignition kits are available for fit-and-forget reliability and easier servicing.

The old Atlas powerplant also got a strengthened clutch with a diaphragm spring – and the old-tech engine was still good enough for a very competitive 120mph top speed. There was life in the old dog yet.

To sell the concept, Norton needed a new modern look for their new flagship model, so they enlisted the Wolff Olins design agency to style the new machine. The striking 'Fastback' design won over the crowds at the 1967 Earls Court Show. It won over the press too, with MCN declaring it 'an entirely new concept in motorcycling' after a 120mph top-speed run. The Commando had arrived.



PRIMARY DRIVE

The stock system actually works really well, but an aftermarket belt-drive conversion can give you a lighter clutch action and an end to weeping primary drive cases.

Over the next four years, the Commando range was cannily expanded by draping the basic engine/frame combination in a variety of clothing. There was the street scrambler 'S' and US-market 'R' model with high-rise 'bars and small tank in 1969, while the following year saw the Roadster, SS and limited-edition Production Racer with tuned 'Combat' engine, join the line-up. The Hi -Rider custom and the Combat-engined large-tanked disc-braked Interstate variants appeared for 1972.

With the over-stressed Combat engine suffering from reliability issues, the big-bore route to upping

performance came in 1973, in the shape of the new 828cc '850' engine. There were some specials, too – a short-stroke 750 racer for the F750 class and a John Player special café racer in 1974, with the final MkII version of the 850 being released in 1975. After that, a few Commandos were assembled from parts, with the last ones dribbling onto the market in 1978. Still, 10 years isn't bad for a stopgap.

What that means for Commando owners today, is one of the best spares and specialist networks of any classic bike. Whatever you might need for your Commando, you can get it – from the smallest

BRAKES

Front drum is the weak point on early Commandos – it's not up to the performance of the bike. The single discs are little better. To make the most of the bike's performance safely, an aftermarket floating disc or twin-disc conversion is probably best.

TIMELINE

1967: Prototype 750 appears at Earls Court Show in September.

1968: Production commences in May, full production in July.

1969: Revised frame fitted after early frames suffer fractures around headstock. MkII engine with new cases and relocated points and advance unit appears. Base model renamed Fastback; 'S' model (with hi-level exhaust) joins the range. Ill-fated, tuned Combat engine appears.

1970: Manufacture of engines and gearboxes moves to Wolverhampton; final assembly from Plumstead to a new factory in Andover. Roadster added; 'S' is dropped mid-year. Revised, upswept 'peashooter' silencers appear. Norvil Production Racer and police Interpol models arrive.

1971: MkIII launched with revised centrestand, switchgear, oil tank, cush-drive rear hub and larger-section tyres. Fastback LR (long range), SS (street scrambler) and Hi-Rider custom appear.

1972: Interstate (Combat engine and 32mm carbs) is introduced. Reliability issues lead to Superblend main bearings and thicker head gaskets being specified from July onwards.

1973: 828cc '850' engine appears (with Superblend bearings as standard). The new model is available as Roadster, Interstate, Hi-Rider or Interpol; 750 is axed. Production moves entirely to Wolverhampton; MkIA 850 model is released in December.

1974: New MkII range: Roadster, Interstate, Hi-Rider and John Player Replica models.

1975: Electric-start MkIII with left-foot gearchange, stronger main bearings, new crankcases and front disc on left. Near the end of the year, NVT is placed in the hands of the receiver.

1976: Around 1500 new bikes are built from parts stocks.

1978: Last few Commandos built at Andover Norton Ltd.

SPECIFICATION

NORTON COMMANDO

(850 model in brackets)

Engine: Air-cooled, ohv, parallel twin

Bore x stroke: 73 x 89mm (77 x 89mm – 77 x

80.4mm on short-stroke version)

Capacity: 745cc (828cc)

Compression: 8.9:1

(8.5:1 – 10:1 Combat engine)

Claimed power: 56bhp at 6500rpm

(60bhp at 6200rpm – 65bhp @ 6500rpm on Combat engine)

Carburetors: 2x30mm Amal Mk1 Concentric (32mm post-73 and Combat engines)

Gearbox: Four-speed

Ignition: Coil

Brakes: 8in/203mm tds front, 7in/178mm sls rear (10.7in/272mm disc front, 7in/178mm sls rear – 10.7in disc on MkIII models)

Tyres: 3.00 x 19in (front), 3.50 x 19in (rear) (4.10 x 19in front, 4.10 x 19in rear)

Weight: 395lb/180kg

(414lb/188kg – 465lb/211kg for MkIII)



fastener to a brand new engine. Norvil even build complete bikes from new parts. There's no excuse for a Commando to be off the road.

That's good, because where a well-sorted Commando belongs is out on the road. Choose between the snappy urge of the 750 and the more laid-back, grunty thrust of the 850 – both are great bikes for everyday use as well as the occasional mad thrash.

Keep the Isolastic bushes adjusted properly and handling should be good enough to keep the most enthusiastic rider happy – and with that 120mph potential you probably won't want much more in the way of performance, either. But if you do – or you want better brakes, suspension or a full café racer makeover, you can get it. There's a staggering range of upgrades available for Norton's final twin.

THE RIDE

Any well set-up Commando model can deliver the sort of ride to confound even the most ardent critic of the British motorcycle industry's reliance on the parallel-twin format. Stopgap, anachronism, whatever you want to call it, the Commando rises above any criticism to deliver a ride to leave you with a smile on your face.

The 750 models couple light weight with a bucketful of long-stroke grunt to deliver genuinely impressive acceleration. And they have an almost uncanny ability to maintain impressively high cruising

**'GET IT PAST
4000RPM AND IT
SMOOHS OUT'**

RESOURCES

Andover Norton

Manufacturer and supplier of new Commando parts.
andover-norton.co.uk

Norvil Motorcycle Co

Original and reproduction parts, workshop services, engine rebuilds and restorations. New Commandos built from all new parts.
norvilmotorcycle.co.uk

Norman White

Engineering, engine builds and a range of upgrades
normanwhite.co.uk

RGM Motors

Mail order parts supplier specialising in Nortons
rgmmotors.co.uk

Steve Maney

Engine rebuilds and performance parts including big-bore kits, racing crankcases, cranks, cams and high-compression pistons.
stevenaney.com

speeds that mark it apart from some other parallel twins. Sure, at low revs a little vibration does get through to the rider, but get the tacho past 4000rpm and everything smooths out, making the Commando feel remarkably civilised for a big parallel twin. It's remarkable to think that the engine is nothing more than the venerable Atlas lump (which was itself essentially a bored and stroked Dominator unit dating back to 1947) tipped on its nose.

The AMC four-speed gearbox is no hindrance to the torquey twin, defying its age to deliver positive changes, and the clutch is even better, with a smooth take-up and reasonably light action. But it's the innovative Isolastic frame system that really makes the Commando what it is. Get the adjustment just right and the worst vices of the parallel twin are effectively isolated from the rider, leaving you free to enjoy a fine-handling chassis to match the punchy engine. The Commando is definitely more than the sum of its parts.

An 850 offers a similar ride – along with a lovely, effortless feel to the power delivery. The bigger engine makes light work of the extra 70lb (31kg) the Commando gained over its production life, and outright performance is about the same as the 750. It all depends what you like – raw or relaxed.

Ride one if you can. It might just redefine how you think about parallel twins.

FRAME

Very early frames often cracked around the headstock. Nearly all will have been replaced under warranty long ago, but it's worth a look on a 1968 model.

The Isolastic bush adjustment needs to be right – too tight and you'll get eyeball-turning vibration, too loose and handling will suffer. Screw adjusters for the Isolastics are a good retro fit (adjustment is by shim as standard).

PRICES

750/850

MINT

£8000-10,000

GOOD

£6000-7000

PROJECT

£2000-3000



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**AUCTIONS**

ESTIMATE
£25,000-
£35,000

BONHAMS STAFFORD PREVIEW APRIL 24-26

Stafford three-day special

Bumper entry means Bonhams are adding an extra day to annual spring sale for the first time

Bonhams' pair of Stafford sales are widely regarded as their flagship events in the UK calendar each year – and this April's Spring Sale will certainly enhance that perception. With the inclusion of a significant percentage of the Morbidelli collection in the catalogue, the decision has been made to run the Stafford sale over three days. The head of Bonhams' UK motorcycle department, James Stensel, says: "Private entries for the sale can easily fill a whole day of the sale schedule, so we're offering the popular parts and memorabilia lots on Friday, with the bikes from the Morbidelli collection going past the block on Saturday. That leaves Sunday for the rest of the catalogue. It's going to be a busy three days."

One of the first bikes from the Morbidelli collection to be catalogued is a fascinating circa 1949 Benelli 'Matchless' G3/L-engined special (right). A number of Italian firms – including ARMA of Milan, Gilera and Benelli reworked ex-military G3/Ls in the immediate post-war period, fitting swingarm rear suspension. This one is estimated at £3000-5000.

A stunning 1927 Matchless 990cc M3/S V-twin (below) is one of the stand-out private entries. A

ABOVE: AJS 350cc R7 racer was restored by Les Williams

RIGHT: Benelli 'Matchless' G3/L-engined special



ESTIMATE
£3,000-
£5,000

contemporary of the Brough Superior SS80, it has the same JAP side-valve engine, but there's a huge difference in price, with the Matchless estimated at £28k-35k.

Another vintage highlight of the sale is sure to be an ex-Les Williams, 1930 AJS 350cc R7 racer (estimate £25k-35k). Restored by the late Triumph guru, it took pride of place in his home for some time and is a top-quality restoration of an important, vintage-era racer.

Introduced for the 1928 season, AJS' ohc racers proved highly competitive. For 1928, the new M7 350 – by then equipped with a four-speed gearbox, Webb forks, revised frame, new crankcases, redesigned camshaft, larger brakes and a saddle tank – appeared and clocked up victories in the German TT, and the Ulster, European and Austrian GPs. The success continued into 1930, with the R7 racking up wins in the Dutch TT and German, Ulster, Austrian and French GPs. AJS' worsening financial situation brought an end to the production of the cammy 350 and 500 racers in 1931. This bike represents an opportunity to own one of the most successful 350cc GP bikes of its era.

Over 200 bikes have been consigned to the sale and the Bonhams team are working to consign a number of collections and individual machines. It looks like being one of their biggest – and busiest – Stafford sales to date.



ESTIMATE
£28,000-
£35,000

LEFT: 1927 Matchless was a Brough Superior SS80 competitor in its day

AUCTION DATES

FEBRUARY

2 Charterhouse sale at the Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset
Charterhouse-auction.com



1985 Suzuki GSX750 at Charterhouse sale (estimate: £2500-3000)

8 Mathewsons sale at Roxby Garage, Thornton-le-Dale, North Yorkshire
Mathewsons.co.uk



1973 Honda SS50 offered at the Mathewsons sale (est: £2750-3250)

MARCH

11-14 Mecum sale at State Farm Stadium, Glendale, Arizona USA
Mecum.com

14 Spicers sale at Sledmere House, Sledmere, East Yorkshire
Spicersauctioneers.com

19 Dorset Vintage and Classic Auctions sale at Henstridge Airfield, Henstridge, Somerset
dvca.co.uk

21 Mathewsons sale at Roxby Garage, Thornton-le-Dale, North Yorkshire
Mathewsons.co.uk

APRIL

7 H&H Auctions sale at The National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham
Handh.co.uk

25/26 Bonhams sale at Staffordshire County Showground, Stafford
Bonhams.com

25 Mathewsons sale at Roxby Garage, Thornton-le-Dale, North Yorkshire
Mathewsons.co.uk

AUCTION EXPERT



JAMES STENSEL BONHAMS

'It's vital to find out as much as possible about a bike you're buying'

Buying a bike should be exciting. But it should be exciting for the right reasons. No one wants to buy a pup. And that's why researching any potential purchase thoroughly is so important. We research bikes consigned to our sales as diligently as possible, but it's still vital to find out as much as possible about a bike you're buying yourself. Between 20 and 100 years of use, ownership and restoration can hide an interesting and very occasionally, worrying history. So, where do you start?

For us, it often starts with the frame and engine numbers – they're the DNA of a motorcycle, so we always try to record and research the numbers ourselves or request clear photographs of the numbers.

We have good relationships with many of the owners' clubs, who are incredibly knowledgeable and helpful. They're usually happy to help prospective owners research engine and frame numbers. You may have to join the club to get the help you need, but that's a small price to pay.

We also check carefully for any evidence of re-stamping. Look for variations in typeface, incorrect frame and engine

number prefixes and any signs of metal having been removed around the numbers.

To check a machine's provenance, look for as much documentation as possible. Ownership documents like the RF60 (the old buff logbook), V5s and V5Cs are a good start, but ask if there are any original purchase receipts or credit agreement paperwork, too. A documented trail of ownership is a great way to ensure you're buying what you think you are.

And, if a bike claims some historical connections, check those claims out. Look for a history file. Check signatures on letters and compare them with other documented signatures by the same person. You can often find photographs of signed documents on the web. Ask the relevant owners' club whether they hold works records – many do.

The more legwork you put into research, the more confident you'll feel about your purchase. And the more you'll enjoy it.

James heads up Bonhams' UK motorcycle department and loves a good project. He's also a sucker for a good single-owner collection. He's in the perfect job.

Meticulously researched offerings from Bonhams Spring Stafford Sale



1954 NSU 250cc Sportmax

Estimate £15,000-20,000

Superb, restored example of NSU's rare, over-the-counter racer, bought by GP star Dickie Dale at the '58 TT.



1989 Manxman 500

Estimate £10,000-15,000

Example of Neville Evans' modern take on the classic Manx Norton. Less than 10 miles from new (but started up at intervals).



Circa 1956 Norton Gold Star special

Estimate £9000-12,000

Not a matching numbers bike, but a lovely special. Dominator 88 frame fitted with BSA DBD34 engine.

**AUCTIONS**

CHARTERHOUSE PREVIEW FEB 2

Two-stroked

Scott leads the way into the 2020 sale season for Charterhouse, while Grant Kawasaki stars at Classic TT sale

Charterhouse's first sale of the year is on February 2 and, while the catalogue was still open for consignments as we went to press, this 1948 Scott Flying Squirrel (below) is one of the early highlights. In good original condition, it has not been used for some time and will require recommissioning before returning to the road. It's estimated at £4000-6000.



ESTIMATE
£4,000-
£6,000



ESTIMATE
£200,000
£220,000

LEFT: Mick Grant with the record-breaking Kawasaki KR750 he'll be selling at the Charterhouse Classic TT sale

Charterhouse are also looking forward to their inaugural sale at the Classic TT over the August bank holiday weekend. Already consigned is Mick Grant's Kawasaki KR750 on which he set a new Isle of Man TT lap record of 112.77mph in 1977. The bike was also clocked at 191mph on the run from Creg ny Baa to Brandish during the race and the record-breaking machine – owned by Mick since 1978 – is estimated to make £200,000-220,000.

FAR LEFT: 1948 Scott Flying Squirrel

MATTHEWSONS REVIEW DEC 14

Running beautifully

Mathewsons' final 2019 auction had plenty to offer – including this Triumph middleweight that was ridden to the sale

There are always some two-wheeled gems among the classic cars at North Yorkshire auctioneers Mathewson's sales and, among the 65 bike lots offered in their final sale of the year, this lovely 1970 Triumph T100R caught the eye. There's increasing interest in British middleweights and this machine certainly looked well cared for – it was actually ridden 40 miles to the sale, proving itself ready for the road. It sold for £5375.

Other highlights from the sale included a lovely 1976 Honda CB750 in very good, original condition, which sold for £6880 and a charming, restored 1950 Douglas MkV that made £3762.



SOLD FOR
£5375

RIGHT: 1927 Sunbeam more than doubled its estimate



SOLD FOR
£29,754

BRIGHTWELLS REVIEW NOV 28

Enduring appeal

Vintage and pre-war machines steal the thunder at Brightwells' November sale

Motorcycles took up the second day of Brightwells' final classic bike and car sale of 2019 at Leominster on November 28. Eighty per cent of the 124 lots sold in a very busy sale room.

Probably the strongest performers from a varied catalogue were some of the pre-war and vintage machines – with seven machines from the collection of the late Richard Morris being among the most hotly-contested lots. All beat their estimates, with a 1927 Sunbeam making the top price for the collection of £29,754 – more than double its £11,000-13,000 estimate.

One of the rarest Vincent models caused one of the biggest stirs of the day. A 1934 HRD Python Sports model (estimate £10,000-15,000), one of only around 106 built and possibly 12 survivors, sold for £32,600, despite requiring total restoration.

But perhaps the most remarkable result from the sale was achieved by an incomplete 1962 Norton Manx Model 11M. Minus its engine, it still made way over its £11,000-12,000 estimate, selling for £25,200.

LEFT: Triumph T100R got to the auction under its own power



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£74,995



1949 Vincent Rapide
£64,995



1951 Vincent Rapide
£64,995



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£27,995



1998 Ducati 916 SPS
£16,995



1948 BSA B32 Comp. Trials
£7,995



1955 BSA RGS Replica
£11,495



1971 BSA Thunderbolt
£6,495



1972 Triumph T100R
£5,995



1967 Triumph T120R
Bonneville £11,495



1973 Triumph T150V Trident
£8,495



1987 Triumph T140 Harris
Bonnie £6,495



1929 Norton Model 18
£27,995



1954 Norton Dominator
Model 7 £6,749



1975 BMW R90S
£8,995



1971 BMW R60/5
£5,495



1992 BMW R100GS
£4,745



1961 Harley FL DuoGlide
£16,995



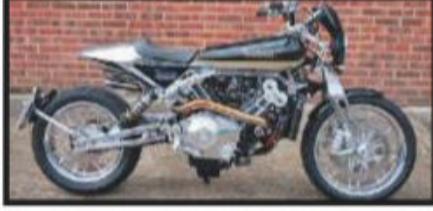
2003 Harley-Davidson
XL1200S £10,995



1976 Honda CR750 Replica
£12,495



Brough Superior Pendine D
£52,495



Brough Superior Pendine S
£52,495



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